

A STRATEGY FOR LEADING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT NORTHVIEW  
BIBLE CHURCH TO MAKE VOCATIONAL DECISIONS  
THAT REFLECT THEIR COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project will endeavor to develop a strategy to assist high school students in making decisions about their future jobs and careers in such a manner that those decisions reflect their devotion to Jesus Christ. In reality, a much greater issue is being addressed. Beneath this specific issue of future career decision-making lies the greater call of living every aspect of their lives through the grid of God's Word and for his glory. Being assessed is: To what extent do high school aged young adults at Northview Bible Church compartmentalize their belief in God in such a manner that it has little impact on practical decisions of their life; in particular, the contemplation of their future career? Also being assessed is: Can the church influence or enhance the current trajectory of their lives?

The project will take place in the context of the high school youth group of Northview Bible Church in Spokane, Washington. Teaching on both "the theology of work" and "right expectation for how God guides his people" will constitute the first aspect of this thesis-project. In the midst of these studies, the truths learned will be illustrated and modeled through the testimonies and interviews of Christian professionals from the same church. At the completion of these two aspects, student understanding and personal plans for implementation will be measured through voluntary participation in a survey and in focus groups.

The desired result is that participating students will begin a journey of discovering the talents with which God has endowed them and make future vocational decisions seeking to steward those gifts in a manner that best serves God and people because they are fully devoted to following Christ in every area of their life.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **VOCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING THAT REFLECT A COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST**

### **The Implications of Choosing to Follow Christ**

When a person chooses to follow Jesus Christ, a whole new order is set for their life. Whereas before this person lived according to their own ideals and made the best choices they could conceive of in their own limited wisdom, now they learn to follow the wisdom, the ways, and the purposes of the creator of the universe. This is an amazing and sometimes agonizing journey. As individuals take this journey, it becomes obvious that the decision to follow Jesus impacts areas of life that were not foreseen at the point of asking forgiveness for sins and declaring a devotion to Christ and his ways. There really is a whole new order set for one's life.

This thesis-project will focus on one aspect of this whole-life journey and on one age set. The one aspect will be how choices of vocation should reflect a person's devotion to Christ. The age set consisting of Christian teenagers, ages 14-18. From this point on, this age group will be referred to as high school students.

Surveys from both the Nazarene Church Growth Research Group and the International Bible Society reveal that 83-85% of Christians made the decision to follow Jesus Christ between the ages of 4 and 14<sup>1</sup>. Probably few high school aged Christians envision that their decision to become a Christian will have any bearing at all on career

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Culbertson, "When Americans become Christian," <http://home.snu.edu/~HCULBERT/ages.htm> [accessed May 18, 2010].

decision-making. In fact, it is the initial contention of this work that high school students, who are entering into the season of their lives when they are preparing for college and a career, have received little or no direction and given little or no thought to how their commitment to follow Jesus Christ should impact their vocational pursuits.

Most recent surveys reveal that the average teenager, though having a positive disposition toward the Bible and God, does very little personal study to gain a true knowledge of God nor do they see him as essential to their lives. As Kenda Creasy Dean states in her book, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, “American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith – but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school.”<sup>2</sup> She goes on to say, “Teenagers tend to approach religious participation, like music and sports, as an extracurricular activity: a good, well-rounded thing to do, but unnecessary for an integrated life.”<sup>3</sup> Dean claims that roughly three quarters of American teenagers call themselves Christians and many are associated with some type of church or parachurch organization. But only half consider it very important and of those many are not actually integrating their faith into everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Dean and colleagues, who continue to evaluate the results of a national survey taken by the National Study of Youth and Religion, have coined a term for the current belief system of American teenagers: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. A crass summary understanding of this belief system views God as a butler or genie or therapist who’s

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<sup>2</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 10.

main objective is to meet people's needs and help one feel better about themselves.<sup>5</sup>

With such an operating worldview or view of God, one would have to conclude that it is unlikely that most teenagers would consider it imperative to steward talents that God has given them as they obediently serve him and his world.

### **The Reigning Mindset for Choosing a Vocation**

The leading secular voices which speak to students about vocational decision-making seem to have a common message: 'Young person! It's all about you and your happiness! Find a job that will make you happy!' Feeding the already selfish human nature, high school students are told in the book *What Color is Your Parachute? For Teens*:

We want to explore who you are, what's important to you, and what you like to do. Why? We believe life is meant to be lived to the fullest, and we want to give you the tools to create the kind of life you want. ...this book is for you, if any of the following describe you:

- You care about how you'll earn a living.
- You have career goals but may not know how to reach them.
- You want to find a college major that's right for you.
- You want to take as much control over your life as possible.
- You hope to become financially independent as soon as possible.
- You hope to find a fun job to finance your life while you figure out what you really want to do for work, what kind of a life you want to have and how you can get that life, and who, as a person, you really want to be.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14. Guiding beliefs of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism: 1) A god exists that created and orders the world and watches over life on earth. 2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the bible and by most world religions. 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4) God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem. 5) Good people go to heaven when they die. ... Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Christen and Richard N. Bolles, *What Color Is Your Parachute? For Teens* (Berkley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2010), 1.

Much of what is taught in such books is good and practical and helpful. What is detrimental is the complete lack of emphasis on stewarding one's passions and gifts endowed by God to serve him. Few students that I have talked to are making any vocational decisions through the grid of stewardship or kingdom service. Rather, enjoyment, wealth and prestige are the front-running motivations in vocational decision-making, and that is, for the students who are making any decisions. Many are banking on the idea that if they go to college they'll stumble upon something they like and everything will fall into place. Statistically, 33% of High school graduates head into college without any idea of what they'll do with their education. And about 50% of college graduates get jobs that have nothing to do with their interests or education.<sup>7</sup>

These types of statistics tell us that not nearly enough intentional career planning is taking place among high school students. It also warns us that our Christian high school students who do seek direction for their future vocations will more than likely hear a message like that from another popular career finding book *Now What? The Young Person's Guide to Choosing the Perfect Career*: "There is only one success – to be able to spend your life in your own way."<sup>8</sup>

If this assessment is correct, that the vast majority of Christian high school students are not making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ, there are obvious implications. One, those students will not be intentionally co-laboring with God in ruling His world as was intended. They will simply be satisfying their own needs and desires for money, purpose, prestige, power, etc. But, God gave the

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<sup>7</sup> Christen and Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute*, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Lore, *Now What? The Young Person's Guide to Choosing the Perfect Career* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 31.

stewardship of his creation to mankind.<sup>9</sup> A Christian's choice of vocation ought to reflect a thoughtful intentionality of serving God and caring for his world and its inhabitants.

Second and related to the first, these Christian teenagers will not fully experience the joy of considering how the Creator has made them, or the sense of purpose when using that information to co-labor with him. That understanding of purpose can only come from a relationship with the Creator and an understanding of why he would create them and how he created them.

And third, these same teenagers will most likely compartmentalize their relationship with Christ and their future vocation. The compartmentalism will look like this: God is the focus of devotions and Sundays, work is the focus of the rest of the week. Again, drawing from comments made by Kenda Creasy Dean, "Apart from "being nice," teenagers do not think religion influences their decisions, choice of friends, or behaviors."<sup>10</sup> The result is their relationship with Jesus Christ will have very little to do with their vocations, even though, on the average, work will account for 60-65% of their waking hours once they enter the work-force.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the marketplace will not hear or see the wisdom and truth and love of God in action to the degree that they would if Christian high school Students viewed their future vocations as an aspect of following and serving Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:28-30. [Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.]

<sup>10</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Doug Scherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1987), 16.

## **The Right Question to Ask While Considering Vocational Choices**

Many books have been written about how to find the right career path. Much of what is taught would be very helpful if the authors began with a Scriptural motivation or purpose for career discovery. To be fair, one would not expect that unless the writers shared a Biblical worldview. None the less, rather than discussing a particular methodology of finding the right career, of which many books have been written, our students need to learn and embrace the Biblical motive and purpose in career planning.

Answering a very specific question will help students develop and maintain a right biblical motive in their vocational planning. Here is the question: “Lord, how can I steward the talents, gifts and passions that you have given me to best serve you and your world?” That is a foundational question that every follower of Christ should be asking as they make career decisions but especially high school students who are at the entrance door of the workforce. (Obvious exceptions exist in countries where political oppression, war, famine, poverty, etc., make mere survival the only goal and vocational choices are non-existent.)

This question envelops three key Biblical truths that the follower of Christ must take into account in vocational decision-making. One, Christians are stewards of what God owns. Our gifts, talents, finances, resources, advantages and disadvantages, physical and mental abilities, our very being are God’s and we are called to wisely use all of what

God has given us. Vocational decision-making must include this truth. We are not our own. We must wisely use what the Creator has given us.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, this question reminds us that God has given individuals specific talents and gifts and passions. Vocational decision-making should include exploration of what gifts, talents and passions a person possesses. This can be quite a challenge for a high school student who has had limited chances to discover these things about themselves. But there could be no better time to start this discovery. God distributed different gifts and talents and interests to every individual. That means that each person is uniquely able to carry out certain jobs. Not every job is an opportunity for every person. Nor is there just one job in which a person could be competent. An ongoing discovery of personal gifting and passions informs a person as to how they can be the best steward possible.

Finally, this question makes us cognizant that we are to serve God in this world through our vocations. Again, it is the contention of this thesis that the average high school student has not made this connection. Their spiritual life and their future vocational pursuits are not thought to have much overlap. Furthermore, unless they feel strongly about preparing to be a pastor or missionary, most would not associate a future career with serving God. As a theology of work is developed in this thesis, it will be clear that a person's vocation should express an understanding that Christians are stewards of talents and gifts and passions that God has given them to serve him in this world.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 25:14-30.

## **Which Vocations Serve God?**

As mentioned above, it is wrong to assume that pastors, missionaries and parachurch ministry positions are the only vocations that directly serve God. Yet that can be people's perception. Doug Sherman in *Your Work Matters to God* writes of one man's paradigm shift upon learning about the dignity of everyday work and how it can be an expression of serving God and people: "Doug, you have no idea of the guilt you have released me from today. For thirty-five years I thought that if I were really to be on the cutting edge for God, I would need to go to the mission field. And yet I never felt like I had the ability or inclination to do that. Today you have given me a whole new vision for my life."<sup>13</sup> The "new vision" this man received was how his current vocation could serve God and his kingdom. It will be the contention of this thesis-project that any morally upright vocation can be a means in which to serve God in his world and that there is no compartmentalizing in following Jesus Christ and a person's vocation.

## **The Strategy: Teaching, Modeling and Assessment of Student Implementation**

Included in this thesis-project will be an intentional strategy and project that will attempt to lead the high school students at Northview Bible Church to make vocational decisions that reflect their devotion to Jesus Christ. The strategy proposed will consist of

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<sup>13</sup> Scherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters*, 21.

the integrated experiences of direction from God's Word; extensive exposure to adults who consider their vocation an aspect of their devotion to Christ; and retrieval of feedback from students to ascertain if they understood and embraced the Biblical teachings of this thesis-project.

With regard to teaching, students will study what Scripture teaches about work. They must know God's purpose and foundational directives for work. Understanding God's purposes for work will heighten their appreciation of the value and nobility of work. It should also increase their anticipation of pursuing an occupation that makes the best use of their abilities for the greatest good. Chapter Two of this thesis will encapsulate the necessary teaching to be presented to the students and Chapter Four will give description of where and when and how this teaching took place.

Another area of Biblical instruction to be taught is the process of receiving God's direction in decision-making. Right expectations are essential for the high school student who is asking God for wisdom and direction about choices of career paths. Obviously this is an enormous subject, but relying upon other people's exhaustive work on this topic, Chapter two will address the necessary teaching of this subject to be presented to the students. Again, a description of where and when and how this teaching took place will be discussed in chapter four.

With regard to giving high school students extensive exposure to adults who consider their vocation an aspect of their devotion to Christ: from Scripture's instruction regarding work, a series of questions will be developed. These questions will be asked of ten different adults over the course of a year in an interview-style format on regular high school youth group meeting nights. The adults will represent a wide range of

professions. This is so that students see the principles of Scripture pounded out in real life and in a number of different vocations. Chapter 4 of this thesis will record some of the content and results of these interviews.

Finally, with regard to retrieving feedback from students to ascertain if they understood and embraced the Biblical teachings of this thesis-project, students will be asked to voluntarily participate in the completion of a survey and discussion in focus groups. The results of the survey will be compiled and conclusions formed from the information. Further information will be gathered through open discussions in focus groups formed according to the student's year of graduation. Again, conclusions will be formed from the information gathered.

The obvious needs to be asserted here – this is just the beginning of a life-long journey of evaluating personal giftedness and deciding how to best steward those gifts to serve God in his world. It is part of being a follower Jesus Christ and the whole new order set for one's life when one makes the decision to follow him.

Previously, NBC (Northview Bible Church) has had no intentional process whereby a student is trained to consider vocational choices as part of their commitment to Christ. That is not to say that there are no students and families in the church who are addressing this connection, but rather the church discipling efforts have not broached the subject.

This brings to mind questions that will need to be asked:

1. What is our student's current understanding of Biblical teaching regarding work?
2. What is our student's current understanding of Biblical teaching regarding the expected stewardship of those talents and gifts?

3. What or who are the voices that form our student's current understanding of vocational decision-making? What are those voices saying?
4. Do they expect a certain amount of direction from God in making their choices? What form will that direction take?
5. What factors (salary, location, prestige, fun, service to God and people, etc.) do our students currently consider important in making future vocational decisions?

In order to find out their understanding of these issues a survey will be taken. At the conclusion of this projected year-long process, focus group discussion with the students will take place. The intension is to analyze survey results and post teaching discussions in order to see what impact the student believe that this emphasis will have on their vocational decision-making, decision-making that should reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ.

### **Beyond the Scope of this Thesis-Project**

This thesis will not include a thorough study of spiritual gifts. The high school ministry of Northview Bible Church does include a study of spiritual giftedness and previous studies will be referenced with the students as part of the project but will not be included in this thesis.

Nor will it cover actual career choices. As mentioned earlier, many good helps are available for that process. This thesis-project will limit itself to addressing the current problem of vocational decisions being made without passing through the Biblical grid of stewarding God-given talents to serve him and his world. If a high school student

becomes engrained with the right Biblical motivation for choosing a career, the before mentioned secular materials can serve them well.

### **Group Demographics**

Northview Bible Church was founded in 1977. Since the church's inception, youth ministry has been a priority. NBC is located in a middle-class community in Spokane, WA. Generally, high school students in attendance come from economically stable families with a high percentage, roughly 90%, of homes remaining intact in the sense of both biological parents being present. Most of the students who regularly participate at the NBC high school group attend one of two area high schools. Both schools have above average academic and athletic programs.

Over an eight year period from 1999 – 2007, six different youth pastors served at the church. The result of such rapid turnover was a program with no intentional teaching plan, no intentional discipleship or spiritual mentoring, and dwindling attendance. Changes since 2007 include the hiring of a seasoned youth pastor, an intentional Biblical education plan, intentional spiritual mentoring and numerical growth climbing to over one hundred students placed onto the church database. Entry into the data base means they participate regularly in one of the three main weekly high school programs. This includes Tuesday night high school group where average attendance is 65, Sunday school where average attendance is 40, and eight midweek discipleship groups in which 48 students currently participate.

Northview Bible Church is an independent evangelical church. The church embraces Scripture as its source of truth for life and Godliness. Northview seeks to follow Jesus' summary of his purpose for mankind: To love the Lord... with all our heart, soul, and mind...and to love other people in the same manner in which we care for ourselves.<sup>14</sup> These beliefs are intentionally being taught to the high school students.

### **Expected Results**

Because teaching on the subject of *making vocational decisions that reflect one's commitment to Jesus Christ* has been so scant with regard to high school students, anticipation is that this project will have a significant impact on high school students of NBC. First, it should give them a better understanding of how their commitment to follow Jesus Christ impacts every area of their life including their vocational path.

Second, secular vocations will be seen on an entirely different plane of importance for them. Once the idea that only pastors and missionaries really serve the Lord is shown to be incorrect, the importance of all labor becomes evident. When it is understood that every morally upright vocation is a way to serve the Lord, the value of work should become a source of great purpose.

Third, when high school students understand that God cares about their future work, it seems likely to help them from compartmentalizing their faith and their vocation. Their vocation will be rightly understood to be a part of how they live for Christ, part of

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 22:36-40.

how they rule his earth. The following quote illustrates the danger of separating faith in Christ and our vocations:

I find that most professionals, and especially most men, hold a mild skepticism toward the faith. They feel that something abstract like faith can't stand the rigors of the street. They attend church on Sunday, and so forth. But religion is a sort of weekend hobby, like golf or fishing. Come Monday, it's time to put away the toys and get back to the real world.<sup>15</sup>

Northview Bible Church's high school students must come to see their life work as one aspect of stewarding their talents and serving their God. This thesis-project should move them in that direction by the teaching that is given and by their interaction with adult, Christian, professionals who carry out their vocation in service to God.

Fourth, it is anticipated that this strategy will increase their understanding of personal talents and interests. Interaction with peers, parents, adults of various professions, as well awareness of vocational assessment tools should help them in their journey of recognizing how God wired them. Personal self awareness is healthy and helpful. In the context of spiritual gifting among members of God's church, Paul commends "sober judgment" or an accurate assessment of how our gifts function for the good of the body of Christ.<sup>16</sup> He warns against thinking too highly of oneself, but commends understanding what ones gifts are and how a person is to then serve God and the body of Christ with those gifts. In like manner, an understanding of one's talents, spiritual gifts, and passions will help our high school students pursue vocational paths that steward those God-given abilities in a manner that serves God and his world.

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<sup>15</sup> Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters*, 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 12:3-8.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON VOCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

#### The Worthy Life

There are many ways to begin a Biblical study regarding what God says about work and our need to choose a vocation that reflects our commitment to him. Here, the choice is to start with Paul's words to the Ephesians as recorded in Chapter 4 and verse 1: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the call to which you have been called."<sup>1</sup> A brief summary of the truths leading up to this statement by Paul gives the reader the context.

Paul has told the church in Ephesus, through his letter to them, that:

1. God has blessed us (all believers) in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3).
2. God has chosen them, before he even created the world, to be holy and blameless (1:4).
3. God predetermined that believers would be adopted as his son/daughter through Christ (1:5).
4. Christ's followers are redeemed and forgiven of their sins through Christ's blood according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon them (1:7-8).
5. His ultimate plan was to put everything under Christ's rule (1:10).
6. God did this all for the praise of his own glory (1:12).
7. God gave them the Holy Spirit as a deposit until he comes again (1:13).
8. They had been dead in their sins, just like the world in which they had immersed themselves (2:1).
9. God loves them and saved them through Christ. They did not and could not save themselves. It was all God's grace. He did all this to show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to them in Christ (2:4-9).
10. God has created his followers to do good works, preparing them in advance (2:10).
11. He, Paul, was called to let gentiles know about these great truths (3:1-13).

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

Then come the challenging words: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the call to which you have been called.” Paul’s passionate and logical conclusion is, “since God has done all this for you, there is a certain way you should live in response.’ The phrase “walk in a manner worthy” carries with it the idea of balancing the scales; what is on one side should balance out what is on the other side. The word translated in the NIV as “worthy” later came to be applied to what was expected to correspond to something else. A person worthy of his pay was one whose day’s work corresponded to his day’s wages.<sup>2</sup>

For example, let us say a gambler has a very bad streak of luck. He or she is now broke, very much in debt and at the mercy of his or her debtors. Completely undeserved, someone gives this gambler \$1,000,000. What would be the worthy response that corresponds to this outpouring of grace to the gambler? Surely that he or she would be very grateful, use the money well in paying off their debt, never gamble again and help others with their gambling problem. Or, let’s say a very overweight person continues to eat lots of fatty foods and sugar laden desserts until one day they are diagnosed with diabetes and subsequently experience kidney failure. An unknown person of great compassion donates one of their own kidneys to this person. What would be the worthy response that corresponds to this outpouring of compassion? That the recipient of the kidney would be grateful, begin to eat right, lose weight and help others who struggle with the same poor eating habits.

This is the passionate plea and the logic born out of gratitude that Paul is using when telling the Ephesians to walk in a manner that corresponds to all that Christ has

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<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1986), 119.

done for them. Paul will now take this truth and apply it to the unity that is necessary in the church at Ephesus and to the various sins that they must forsake in order for this to happen. But this logical truth is one that must be applied to every area of life, including the making of vocational decisions.

If in our church, NBC, leadership sends out students from the youth ministry with the goal of being nice people, a failure has occurred. It is a follower of Christ's responsibility to live their life in a worthy manner of their calling, not just to be nice. Every area of a Christian's life must reflect one's calling – what God has done for them. Does the future vocational area of a student's life fall outside of what it means to live a life worthy of the calling they have received? The answer is a resounding, 'no.'

To be sure, other scriptures speak to this same issue. In Colossians 3:23-24, Paul says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." In this context of slavery, there was no true choice of vocation as we are discussing. More than half of the people on the streets of cities of the Roman world were slaves. That included all types of professional people as well, such as teachers, doctors and craftsmen. Paul tells slaves to consider their service that they performed for their masters as not first being done for their owners but truly being done as unto the Lord. This truth transformed the most menial job and gave it dignity.<sup>3</sup> The response worthy of all God had done for them was to perform their vocational responsibilities, albeit as slaves, with excellence.

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<sup>3</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol. 11*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 219-220.

In the book of Romans, Chapter twelve, verse 1 Paul writes, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” ‘Urge’ translates the Greek word *parakaleo*, a term that carries both the idea of a command and a plea.<sup>4</sup> Paul lands somewhere between commanding and pleading with the Romans that on account of all the mercy that God has shown them in saving them, the right response, the worthy response is to present their lives as a sacrifice to Him. They live now for God. All aspects of their lives are now lived in deliberate service to Him and one’s vocation would be included.<sup>5</sup>

Martin Luther said it this way:

What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our calling here on earth in accordance with His word and command He counts as if it were done in heaven for Him... Therefore we should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and the work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and the work flow.<sup>6</sup>

Followers of Christ are called to live every area of their lives for Christ; it is he who we serve. It is he to whom we offer every area of our lives, living sacrifices devoted to doing his good will. God’s calling must lead us to live worthily, accomplishing purposes that are prompted by our faith in him. This harkens back to the key question of this thesis that a follower of Christ must answer for themselves, “Because of all that God

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<sup>4</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Vol. 10*, ed. Frank Gaebelien (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 127.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Expositor’s*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> W.R. Christian Forrester, *Vocation: Studies in Faith and Work* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 147.

has done for me how can I live a life worthy of his calling and now steward the talents, gifts and passions that he has given me to best serve him?"

### **Misunderstandings about Work**

In talking with students at Northview Bible Church, there seems to be a default mode whereby the expectation is "I should get to play until I'm out of high school, then I may need to get a summer job while in college." Teenage years are almost an assumed stage of life that does not include work. This does not seem to be a 'laziness' issue, but more of a cultural issue of the community. High school is a time for school activities; college is a time for meeting lots of people and stretching one's thinking, and preparing for a career; then upon graduation from college, it is time to find a job. That happens about the age of twenty two. This reveals a wrong understanding of work; a belief that work is a burden and should be put it off as long as possible.

Even parents at NBC have made comments such as "I'm not going to have my son or daughter get a job while they are in high school. They have their whole lives to work. They need to be kids while they can." This also reveals a wrong understanding of work. As if work is a burden that is coming and should hold it off as long as possible. This is not to say that every high school student must have a job, rather the attitude that "work is a burden to be avoided" can be unintentionally communicated from parents to children.

Another wrong understanding of work is communicated by American culture at large when our values define the value of work to be self-fulfillment, making large sums

of money, and prestige and power associated with particular vocations. Doug Sherman identifies this as a prevalent attitude among the general public when he writes, “The world has come up with a different set of rules than the God who created mankind. God’s rules are ‘deny yourself.’ The new man-made rules are ‘fulfill yourself.’ God’s... ‘love the Lord thy God. Man’s... ‘love the lord thyself.’”<sup>7</sup> That too reveals a wrong understanding of work, as though work is the goal/god of life.

Again, initial conversations with students at Northview Bible Church reveal that many had not considered that God cared about their careers. More specifically, they believed that God cared about them and would probably even help them find a job, but that vocations were not really a big part of their serving God, except that he would want them to be hardworking and honest. This comes scarily close to the National Study of Youth and Religion’s conclusion that teenagers view Christianity as ‘moralistic, therapeutic deism’ in that God exists to meet their needs: “God, please get me a job that I would really like.”

As mentioned in the first chapter, this wrong understanding can result in Christians commuting back and forth from work life to private life, living in two different worlds and values. It can also lead to Christians discounting the value of work, thinking that only missionaries and pastors do anything that matters to God, and everyone else ‘puts in their time’ in order to pay bills. Nearly as wrong is the belief that evangelism is the only possible eternal value that work could have.

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<sup>7</sup> Doug Scherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1987), 19.

## Theology of Work

God reveals in his word that he is a worker. One doesn't have to go far to find that truth taught. Open to the first page and the first verse of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and there it is... "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God is a worker. Scripture records God consistently and continually working on behalf of his creation: the universe and earth itself,<sup>8</sup> the animals in it,<sup>9</sup> and all of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

God also reveals that he made mankind to be workers. One can't help but consider that this is part of what is included when God said that mankind was made in his image. Genesis 1:26-28 records:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

To rule the creatures of the earth and subdue it is what God has called us to do.

Subdue comes from the Hebrew word *kabash*, meaning 'bring into subjection.'<sup>11</sup> As

Barnes writes,

(Man) is therefore authorized, by the word of the Creator, to exercise his power in subduing the earth and ruling over the animal kingdom. This is the meet sequel of his being created in the image of God. Being formed for dominion, the earth and its various products and inhabitants are assigned to him for the display of his powers. The subduing and ruling refer not to the mere supply of his natural needs, for which provision is made in the following verse, but to the accomplishment of his various purposes of science and beneficence, whether towards the inferior

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 65:9-13.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 12:6.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:43-48.

<sup>11</sup> *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Bible soft and International Bible Translators, 2006).

animals or his own race. It is the part of intellectual and moral reason to employ power for the ends of general no less than personal good. The sway of man ought to be beneficent.<sup>12</sup>

I would offer the following application of ‘subduing the earth’: to learn a skill and then bring God’s ways and wisdom to that vocation, thereby subduing his creation in this specific area. For example, one can learn the skills required to be an engineer. The knowledge necessary to become an engineer is not the purpose of Scripture, and Scripture gives little or no help toward mastering the necessary skills. Man has been given the abilities to understand God’s laws of his creation and must acquire those skills on his own. Then, it is our responsibility to take those skills and to rule and subdue the earth like he would. So a person should bring God’s wisdom to that field. Wisdom would include everything from stewardship of his creation,<sup>13</sup> the betterment of mankind,<sup>14</sup> and excellence in work.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously the Bible does not intend to tell one how to be a photographer, or a doctor, or a sports trainer, or do construction, or be a beautician, nurse, driver of heavy machinery, electrician or a musician. Those are all examples of skills men and women have been given the ability to learn. But mankind is supposed to use those skills to serve God and his creation in a manner that attempts to emulate how he himself would subdue and care for his creation. He tells how to treat other people,<sup>16</sup> about the dangers of debt,<sup>17</sup> the dangers of co-signing loans,<sup>18</sup> about fair pay to workers,<sup>19</sup> about getting counsel from

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<sup>12</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes: Notes on the Old Testament*, ed. Robert Frew (Biblesoft, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 8:6-8.

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 6:7-10.

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 22:29 and Colossians 3:17.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 22:39.

<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 22:7.

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 6:1-5.

<sup>19</sup> James 5:1-4.

many sources,<sup>20</sup> about honesty in dealings,<sup>21</sup> about sharing the gospel with those we come into contact with,<sup>22</sup> etc. Like God, man creates, organizes, manages, rules and takes care of the earth and its inhabitants. King David marvels at this truth in Psalm 8:3-9:

When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under his feet:  
all flocks and herds,  
and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air,  
and the fish of the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth.

God is a worker. Both the Old and New Testament attest to this.<sup>23</sup> God also created man in his image, which includes being workers also.

### Our Work is an Extension of God's Work

"All legitimate work is an extension of God's work. By legitimate work I mean work that somehow contributes to what God wants done in the world, and does not actively contribute to what He does not want done. Naturally, it goes without saying that illegal and immoral work is therefore a corruption of God's work."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 15:22.

<sup>21</sup> Proverbs 11:1.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

<sup>23</sup> See John 4:34, John 14:12, Philippians 1:6 as examples.

<sup>24</sup> Sherman and Henricks, *Your Work Matters*, 84.

It is very important that students and all people make the connection between their everyday work and how that work contributes to what God wants done in the world. In other words, they need to know how, as a professional athlete they will be a coworker with God. How as a salesman, their work will co-labor with God. How driving the combine, working as the bank teller, writing as a journalist, being a gym teacher, the CEO of waste management, a doctor, or writing out mortgage loan applications, will contribute directly to God's work. When a person can clearly articulate how a particular vocation contributes to God's work then they know how the stewardship of their gifts will serve God and his world.

Man's vocation is to be an extension of God's work for a number of reasons. First, through work other people are served. Again, Doug Sherman gives a good illustration of this truth when he writes:

A friend of mine operates a pallet company. Pallets are the platforms used extensively in the transportation industries, designed to make it easier for forklifts to load and unload stacks of goods. My friend's company manufactures these pallets.

Now how could my friend's pallets possibly fit into the work of God in the world? Actually they are an important, albeit humble link in a complex chain that God uses to meet my needs and your needs. Those pallets are an indispensable part of the trucking industry – an industry that delivers ruby-red grapefruit from the Rio Grande Valley, boxes of cereal from Battle Creek, Michigan, and milk from Coppell, Texas, to a supermarket near my home.

All of these come together at my family's breakfast table. Before we eat, one of my children thanks God for the food. Why? Because He has brought to our table something we need.

We must recognize however, that God has used a rather extensive system of workers to give us this food. He has used farmers to plant and cultivate citrus trees and wheat, and to raise dairy cows. We might also mention the scientists who have checked the food for purity, and the bankers who have arranged for the financing. Then, too, there are the dealers of farm equipment, and behind them the builders of that equipment.

Then we should remember the trucks and their drivers that God has used to haul this food our way. And we should appreciate the truck stop operators along the way who have provided diesel fuel and coffee. And, of course, someone had to lay down those miles of interstate that connect our country.

And finally, we should thank God for the supermarket employees, for the guy who carries the bag to our car, and for my wife who puts it all on the table. By the way, did you notice my friend's pallets? They were tucked away under those crates of grapefruit, boxes of cereal, and gallons of milk. Though obscure, God used them to meet my family's needs.

But are they significant? Yes, because meeting my family's needs is significant. It is Godlike. It is something he wants done. It is loving me and my family. Consequently, my friend is actually contributing directly to God's work in the world. Through his work, he is serving the needs of people like my family.<sup>25</sup>

A trustworthy mechanic, doctor, dentist, loan officer, contractor, trash collector, waitress, nurse and pastor all can see their work as an extension of God's work. If they are doing their work as unto the Lord, the best they can, bringing his wisdom to their area of expertise, their work is an extension of God's work and they are serving the people of his creation. Luther speaks to this truth with these words:

God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocations that is. He who engages in the lowliness of his work performs God's work, be he lad or king. To give one's office proper care is not selfishness. Devotion to office is devotion to love, because it is by God's own ordering that the work of the office is always dedicated to the well-being of one's neighbor. Care for one's office is, in its very frame of reference on earth, participation in God's own care for human beings. So vocation belongs to this world, not to heaven; it is directed toward one's neighbor, not toward God. This is an important preliminary characteristic. In his vocation one is not reaching up to God, but rather bends oneself down toward the world. When one does that, God's creative work is carried on.<sup>26</sup>

Such a person is also answering the question "How can I best steward the talents, gifts and passions that God has given to me to best serve him and his Kingdom?"

Second, human vocations are an extension of God's work because they allow people to meet the needs of their own family. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 Paul writes:

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<sup>25</sup> Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters*, 88-89.

<sup>26</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*. Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 9-10.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: If a man will not work, he shall not eat.

Paul also writes in 1 Timothy 5:8: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” A person’s vocation is an extension of God’s work, in that vocations allow people to meet the needs of their own family.

A third way vocations can be understood as an extension of God’s work is in how money earned from a job allows us to help meet the needs of others. Paul tells the people of Ephesus that they should do something useful with their hands so they may have something to share with those are in need.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, in many vocations, people are placed into the lives of others as colleagues or coworkers with the opportunity to tell them about God and take on the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> As the project portion of this thesis is explained in chapter four, examples will be given of many people from NBC’s congregation who understand and live out their role as ambassadors for Christ in their various vocations.

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<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 4:28.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

## Why Work Is Often Viewed as a Burden

Scripture makes it clear that work is not a result of the fall of man. He created us as rulers of his world who are to subdue it. Work was part of God's plan prior to sin entering the world. But the entrance of sin had an impact on all of creation as God put a curse on his world and mankind. The curse impacts work and will do so until the new heavens and earth are put into place.

The first result of sin on work is that work would forevermore be hindered and frustrated. Man was placed in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. The work would be productive and unhindered. The curse placed upon man and the world because of Adam and Eve's sin would impact the ground and work would now become a painful toil. According to the book of Genesis, Chapter two, verse fifteen, thorns and thistles were introduced and work would be hindered: "Then the LORD GOD took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." This is seen again in chapter three, verses seventeen to nineteen:

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';

Cursed is the ground because of you;  
In toil you will eat of it  
All the days of your life.  
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;  
And you will eat the plants of the field;  
By the sweat of your face  
You will eat bread,  
Till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return."

The second and related result is the element of futility to work.<sup>29</sup> Man's work lasts for a brief, shining, and enjoyable moment. And mankind should celebrate that moment. But then the impact of the work passes. More work must be done to maintain any accomplishment. The thorns and the thistles compromise the work accomplished and the results of the work will not remain without constantly combating their influence.

A third result of sin on work is how the sin in every person brings many negative and burdensome aspects with it. Laziness, cheating, lying, stealing, selfishness, meanness, impatience, greed, pride, injustice, favoritism, being a workaholic, i.e. all sins known to exist in mankind are active in the marketplace like every other area of life. It is important to build upon the right foundation: Work is not the curse. Work is good, we were created for it. But when mankind sinned, God cursed the ground and work is now hindered and has a sense of futility to it, and sin's presence in all men adds negative aspects to work and an element of burden to work that was not God's perfect plan.

### Summary of the Theology of Work

Followers of Christ are commanded to live a life worthy of our calling, of all that God has done in Christ on our behalf. This encompasses every area of our life, including choices of vocation. Though often thought to be a result of the curse or a burden, man was created to work. As God is a worker, so man is created in his image as a worker. Man's work is an extension of God's work when a skill is learned and then carried out in a manner that reflects God's care for his earth and for mankind. Work serves people, provides for the workers family, provides money to help those in need, and puts

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<sup>29</sup> Romans 8:20.

Christians into working relationships where they can express God's love and plan for all people.

It is imperative that NBC's high school students understand the purpose of work and begin considering early on what skills and interests God has given them and how they can steward those skills to best serve him in a manner worthy of their calling.

### **The Leading of God in Choosing a Vocation**

A foundational theological aspect of choosing a vocation that reflects one's commitment to Christ is getting guidance from God on what vocation to choose. This necessitates an understanding of how God guides a person in making decisions. Right expectations are very important.

Like any Christian high school student, those at NBC want God to give them direction in choosing the right vocation and the right college to prepare them for that choice. Motives may often be self-serving at this point, but none-the-less, there is a definite desire for divine direction and expectations are everything. Should the students expect that God has but one decreed vocational plan for their life and their job is to find that vocation? Should they expect silence from the heavens because God does not give direction in such decision-making, but leaves it completely up to them? Giving them a right expectation concerning God's guidance in making vocational choices is crucial.

## What to Expect

As God's creatures, we are participants in a mystery. The mystery is how God can be completely in control of all that he has created and at the same time mankind is said to have free will. Both can be seen clearly in Scripture. The following are but a few scriptural examples of God's complete sovereign control:

Your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.<sup>30</sup>

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.<sup>31</sup>

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse  
wherever he pleases.<sup>32</sup>

Have you not heard?  
Long ago I ordained it.  
In days of old I planned it;  
now I have brought it to pass,  
that you have turned fortified cities  
into piles of stone.<sup>33</sup>

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its  
desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those  
in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the  
time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.<sup>34</sup>

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth  
and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands,  
as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and  
everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should

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<sup>30</sup> Psalm 139:16.

<sup>31</sup> Proverbs 16:33.

<sup>32</sup> Proverbs 21:1.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 37:26.

<sup>34</sup> Luke 21:20-22.

inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.<sup>35</sup>

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.<sup>36</sup>

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.<sup>37</sup>

Each of these passages tells of God's sovereign rule, that is, that his plans are being carried out exactly as he determined since eternity past. Such teaching, left unbalanced by the rest of Scripture, can lead a person to believing that the task is to approach God's plan for every individual's life as if it's printed on a road map. A person's lifelong task is to figure out the exact route God has planned for them and make sure they are on that exact route. To take a wrong turn or miss an exit is to miss God's plan for one's life. Such can be the spoken or unspoken expectations for a young person trying to determine God's plan for his or her life in terms of vocation. A sentiment that would sound something like this: "I must figure out exactly what God has planned for me to do vocationally during my life, the exact job. If I miss it I will have wasted my life."

An even worse version of contemplating this piece of the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's freewill would be to believe that a person can not get off of God's exact route, because whatever decision one makes was actually God's plan all along. He planned the route before the creation. If left with only these statements of God's sovereignty, one could easily slip into a fatalistic mindset. That is to say to oneself, "I cannot change my destiny, whatever happens was always going to happen." A student

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 17:24-27.

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 1:11.

<sup>37</sup> Philippians 2:13.

falling into this belief will find little motivation to seek God's wisdom in the pursuit of a vocation. They are just living out a script that has already been written for them.

But the mystery in Scripture teaches another set of truths, namely, that mankind is given both the joy and the responsibility to make choices. As Wayne Grudem says,

... (That) God's providential direction is an unseen, behind-the-scenes, 'primary cause,' should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and we are responsible. We do have choices, and these are real choices that bring about real results. Scripture repeatedly affirms these truths as well.<sup>38</sup>

The following are but a few scriptural examples of the freedom mankind have been given:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD YOUR God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.<sup>39</sup>

But if serving the LORD SEEMS undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.<sup>40</sup>

For lack of guidance a nation falls,  
but many advisers make victory sure.<sup>41</sup>

Plans fail for lack of counsel,  
but with many advisers they succeed.<sup>42</sup>

For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD.  
Repent and live!<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 321.

<sup>39</sup> Deuteronomy 30:19-20.

<sup>40</sup> Joshua 24:24:15.

<sup>41</sup> Proverbs 11:14.

<sup>42</sup> Proverbs 15:22.

<sup>43</sup> Ezekiel 18:32.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.<sup>44</sup>

Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.<sup>45</sup>

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.<sup>46</sup>

Each of these passages speaks of human freedom and the need for people to make their own choices about obedience to God as well as wise decision-making in daily decisions. Theologians have considered the conflict of these two teachings in Scriptures for centuries. This writer is content to say that both are taught in Scripture, the mystery of how they work together is just that, a mystery. Henry Thiessen says it well in his *Lectures in Systematic Theology*:

It is difficult to refrain from adopting one or the other of two extremes: that God is the sole actor in the universe or that man is the sole actor. The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. ...God sometimes allows man to do as he pleases; that is, he puts no restraints in the way of man's carrying out his wicked desires. Also, God sometimes keeps a man from doing what, in his freedom, he would otherwise do. He uses circumstances, the influence of friends, and inner restraints to accomplish this purpose.... Finally, God always overrules what man does in order to accomplish his own ends.<sup>47</sup>

The high school students at Northview Bible Church, or any other church's high school student for that matter, need to know what to expect as they look for God's guidance in their vocational decision-making now and throughout their adult lives. In learning from the preceding passages, and specific examples from Scripture of how God gave guidance

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew 11:28-29.

<sup>45</sup> Ephesians 5:15-17.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Peter 3:9.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 128.

to people in the past, one can derive correct expectations and even a process of sorts for making wise decisions that draw upon God's guidance.

### *Attaining God's Direction: Studying His Moral Commands*

A suggested process for attaining God's direction has been explained well in books by authors such as Gary Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*<sup>48</sup>; Jerry Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life: How to Make Every Decision with Peace and Confidence*<sup>49</sup>; and Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?*<sup>50</sup> The process may be described in the following manner.

In figure 1, the empty box represents an issue that a person needs to make a decision about and would like God's guidance. The emptiness of the box illustrates that the person has no current guidance from God on this matter. For this project, the issue will be: "How can one best steward the talents, gifts and passions God has given them to best serve him."

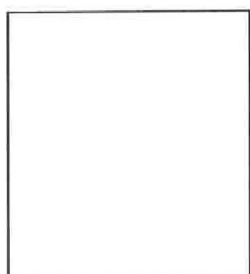


Figure 1. A future decision for which no guidance has yet been given or sought.

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<sup>48</sup> Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God: An Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980).

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Jerry Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life: How to Make Every Decision with Peace and Confidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

The first question one needs to seek an answer for in Scripture is whether or not it is normal for God to show people the future. Since God is sovereign and He knows every person's future, will he reveal it to people ahead of time? Will he tell a person ahead of time who they are going to marry? Will he reveal ahead of time a specific college one should attend? Considering the specific topic of this thesis, will God reveal to a high school student ahead of time, one vocation a student should pursue that will best use the talents, gifts and passion with which he has thus endowed the student?

It should be noted that there is some precedent for God revealing future vocations in Scripture. God did reveal to Moses that his vocation would be to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrews out of slavery.<sup>51</sup> God did reveal to Saul and David and others that they would be future kings of Israel.<sup>52</sup> God did reveal to Paul that his vocation would be to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>53</sup> It is safe to say, each of these situations would readily be considered a miracle. It is not normally the way God works, but he has and can reveal such things. Deuteronomy 29:29 says "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Here Moses' words teach that it is the law that God has revealed to mankind, but many things he has not revealed and the pages of scripture would lead a person to believe that included in these "secrets" are the specifics of future events of individual's lives. Solomon gets even more specific in Ecclesiastes 7:14 where he writes "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." Bruce Waltke says it this way: (it is faulty logic to

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<sup>51</sup> Exodus 3:10.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Samuel 9:15-16; 10: 1.

<sup>53</sup> Acts 9:15-16.

say) “God has a plan, and therefore He intends that I find it.” ... Simply because God has a plan does not mean that He necessarily has any intention of sharing it with you; as a matter of fact the message of Job is in part that the Lord in His sovereignty may allow terrible things to happen to you, and you may never know why.”<sup>54</sup>

The tenor of Scripture is that in normal situations God does not reveal a specific person’s specific future and so will not normally reveal to a high school student a specific vocation to pursue. Jerry Sittser wrote in his book, *The Will of God as a Way of Life*:

What does the future hold for me? We simply do not know, we cannot know and we should not know. If we did know the future, we would be too overcome with utter surprise or terror (or both) to respond wisely and make the most of it. ... Do I dare even hazard a guess about the future? Do I really want to know what the future will be? How would such knowledge really help me? How would it help any of us? On the one hand, if we foresaw that our future was going to be hard and painful, full of suffering, we would recoil, fretfully awaiting its awful reality and wishing we could change it, which would mean that we would also miss the wisdom and character that suffering engenders. And if, on the other hand, we learned that our future was going to be easy and pleasant, we would become dull and complacent, which would only diminish our capacity to enjoy the pleasant future that was going to be ours.<sup>55</sup>

Since there is precedent, it is not a foolish request to ask God for specific revelation, just realize it is not normal for him to grant such a request.

This does not mean God gives no guidance. Going back to diagram 1, the empty box that represents an issue for which guidance is desired; one can often receive guidance by knowing the moral commands of God. See this illustrated in figure Two. Through God’s revealed moral commands, we find information that gives perimeters and thus narrows our choices and gives us good direction.

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<sup>54</sup> Waltke, *Finding the Will of God*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Sittser, *The Will of God*, 27-28.

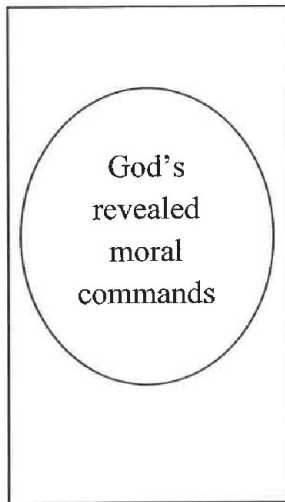


Figure 2. Future decisions are narrowed by God's moral commands.

God has given commands and wisdom to us in written form in the Bible. For instance, with regard to vocations, God, through his word would give a person this wisdom:

1. The need to have a lawful and moral job (prohibitions against prostitution, etc.)
2. The need to work for one's own needs. - 2 Thess. 3:10-11
3. The need to be able to provide for one's own family. - 1 Timothy 5:8
4. The need to have work habits that include:
  - Submissiveness and respect toward one's employer. - Ephesians 6:6-8
  - Diligence and integrity in performance as if Christ is one's employer. - Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12
  - Preserving God's reputation and showing the attractiveness of his ways by one's actions in the marketplace. - 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:10
  - No abuse of people under one's supervision. - Ephesians 6:9
  - Paying employees a fair day's wage and on time. - James 5:4

God's moral commands give some direction in a high school student's decision-making process regarding a future vocation is that jobs such as anything in the pornography industry, the gambling industry, illegal sale of drugs, etc., should not be on their potential vocation lists. Beyond that, his moral commands tell mankind that their vocations are to serve him by caring for his creation, especially his people. Very few commands will direct a student to a specific vocation, but they do give a narrowing process to what the future vocation must incorporate. One is led to believe that God has given mankind great freedom in choosing vocations and that every vocation's purpose is the care for his creation.

#### *Attaining God's Direction: the Pursuit of Wisdom*

The next directive from God is really a call for a student to embrace wisdom as their guide. This affirms that students are not supposed to be waiting for God to supernaturally communicate to them a specific career path. Rather, they seek wisdom and make wise choices based upon that wisdom received. The writer of Proverbs teaches "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she (wisdom) is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her."<sup>56</sup> Later in chapter fourteen verse eight, the writer also teaches "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception."

Referring back to the right question for students to be asking, "How can I steward the talents, gifts and passions that God has given me to best serve him?," most of the

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<sup>56</sup> Proverbs 3:13-15.

answers to this question come from prayer, self- evaluation, contemplation, research, and seeking other's advice. Another word for this process would be seeking and applying wisdom. It's an acknowledgement that God has created them with certain talents. He's wired them a specific way. As they begin identifying how God has wired them, they have the freedom and responsibility to consider how they can best use that wiring to serve God.

Figure three illustrates how God's expressed command to seek wisdom continues to narrow students decisions.

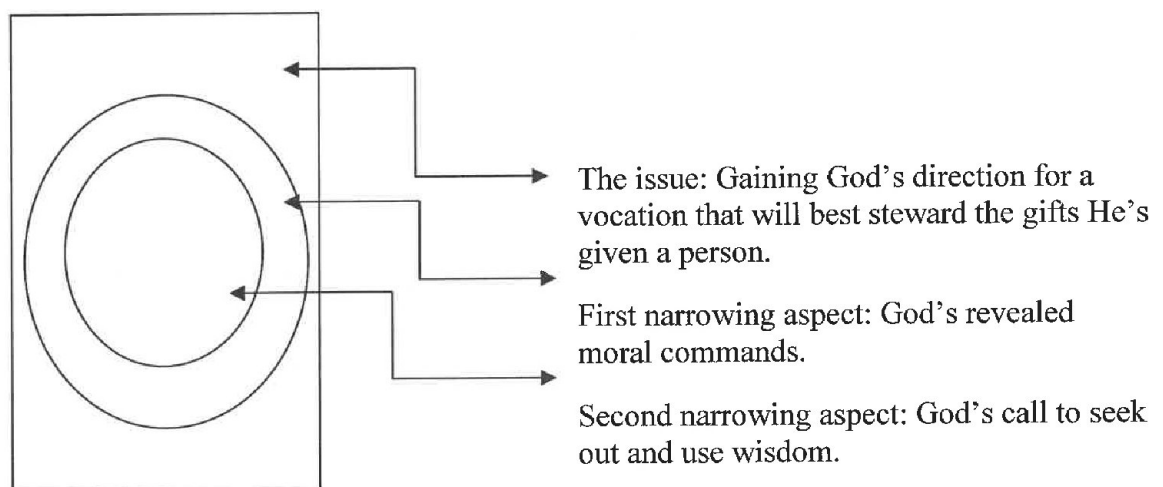


Figure 3. Future decisions are narrowed further through wisdom.

### Wisdom From Prayerful Self Evaluation

Gaining an understanding of one's talents comes from asking God to help in arriving at an honest self-evaluation of personal gifting from him. This takes introspection and asking oneself hard questions such as:

In what have I had success? In what courses at school do I excel? What do I like to do? What captures my attention? What kinds of problems do I like to solve? What physical skills do I have? What mental skills do I have? What interpersonal skills do I have? In his book *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?*, Bruce Waltke writes:

I appreciate a man who knows his own giftedness and doesn't let his ego carry him away. Before you make a major decision, consider the gifts God gave you. Do the ramifications of your decision match your gifts? Know who you are. Evaluate your abilities and talents. Don't try to be what you're not, because if you do you will live in a constant state of anxiety.... Christians must know who they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and they must be content within those limitations.... You can't give what you don't have.<sup>57</sup>

There are a variety of books and personal assessments that can also be helpful to a student as he or she begins identifying their own skills and talents. As mentioned prior, appendix A contains many such helps. The obvious point is that our high school students need to begin prayerfully considering and identifying how God has wired them.

### Wisdom From the Counsel of Others

Also important in attaining God's direction through wisdom is to receive the counsel of others. Scripture is full of directives to seek such counsel:

For lack of guidance a nation falls,  
but many advisers make victory sure.<sup>58</sup>

Plans fail for lack of counsel,  
but with many advisers they succeed.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Waltke, *Finding the Will of God*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> Proverbs 11:14.

<sup>59</sup> Proverbs 15:12.

A wise man has great power,  
and a man of knowledge increases strength;  
for waging war you need guidance,  
and for victory many advisers.<sup>60</sup>

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,  
and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.<sup>61</sup>

Parents and other family members, pastors, good friends and teachers are all good resources for a high school student to receive counsel as to what skills and talents they have. Admittedly, for a high school student, this is challenging because their age has not given them a lot of experience from which to draw conclusions. But many will be surprised how much insight they can already accumulate about the talents and abilities with which God has uniquely constructed them. This is really the beginning of a life long process and the answers will change and expand as one grows older, gains skills and more experience and becomes wiser. Now is the time to begin.

### Wisdom From Research

One additional aspect of attaining direction from God can come through research. Once a student begins to be able to articulate how God has gifted them, they can then begin exploring vocations that utilize those skills and talents. Research and planning is such a natural and obvious action that when it happens in Scripture it can be missed as a normal part of how God leads people. Joshua sent in spies so the men of Israel would know what to expect as they entered Canaan.<sup>62</sup> Nehemiah checked out the condition of Jerusalem

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<sup>60</sup> Proverbs 24:5-6.

<sup>61</sup> Proverbs 27:9.

<sup>62</sup> Joshua 2.

before he carried out the plan God had put upon his heart to rebuild the city walls.<sup>63</sup> In challenging men to be his disciples, Jesus used two parables – one of knowing the cost of a project before heading into it so as not to come up short and another of a king going into battle knowing whether or not he had a chance against his opponent. The point of both parables was for people to know the expected commitment ahead of time so they know what they’re getting into if they choose to follow him.<sup>64</sup> It’s the wisdom of planning and doing research.

Part of finding God’s direction in vocational decision-making includes doing some good planning and research. A high school student, armed with at least a vague understanding of his or her unique talents and gifts now can research what types of professions utilize the God-given talents and interest that they have. Likewise, they may have an interest in a particular career and find out that God has not given them the talents necessary for such a vocation. A student interested in aspects of engineering but who greatly struggles at math and physics may have to come to the conclusion that engineering is probably not the best way to steward his or her talents to serve God. A student may have always wanted to be a firefighter but after researching that profession, realizes his health and physical strength would not allow him to pass the extreme physical testing a firefighter must go through. This is part of obtaining God’s direction through the pursuit of wisdom. On the other hand, as a student job shadows a doctor and finds himself very interested in the normal aspects of being a physician, then finds out what subjects in which a doctor must be proficient, that student may find out his talents and interests really fit the medical field.

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<sup>63</sup> Nehemiah 2:11-16.

<sup>64</sup> Luke 14:25-33.

### *Attaining God's Direction: Asking for Special Guidance*

So as not to discount the fact that God can and has broken into people's lives in specific ways revealing specific information, it is necessary to reiterate that one is never foolish to ask God if he has a specific vocation which he wishes the student to pursue. In the same miraculous manner in which God revealed his will to a few individuals in the past, so he may again today in a person's life. See this illustrated in figure four.

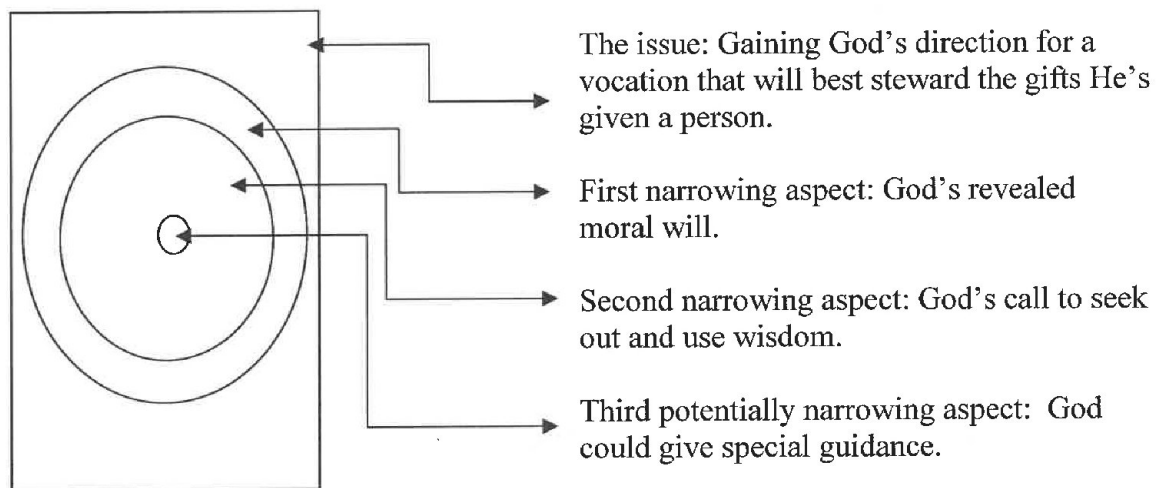


Figure 4. Future decisions could receive special guidance from God.

The Biblical stance taken in this thesis-project is that the normal expectation is that God gives his people direction through his revealed moral commands; then calls them to use wisdom gained from prayer, introspection, self-evaluation, and counsel from others to begin identifying the talents and passions that God has given each person. Then they should begin researching occupations that utilize the talents with which one has been endowed by God. This process acknowledges both the freedom and responsibility to steward those talents and passions in such a way as to best serve God who distributed those talents for his glory and purposes. Special guidance would be the exception not the

rule. Special guidance will not be given to most people, even those Christians considering vocational ministry, leaving God's people great freedom and responsibility to make wise choices in how they steward his gifts given to them.

### *Attaining God's Direction: Responding to God's Sovereignty*

The sovereignty of God teaches that he is never out of control of his universe, rather his plans are always being carried out in his timing and for his purposes and are never once thwarted. His power, wisdom and constant watch over every part of his creation guarantee this. This truth adds the adventure to all areas of life, including the vocational journey. It is in the arena of God's sovereignty where opportunities unexpectedly open up. Finances become available to attend colleges that will train a student to carry out a vocation that exercises their God-installed talents. Unplanned encounters with business leaders open doors to apprenticeships and careers. Relationships that turn into mentorships help prepare a student for future work.

God's sovereignty is also the arena where opportunities unexpectedly dry up. Open doors slam shut. The apparent best college for preparation for a specific vocation rejects an application. Funds available for school are not awarded. The internship that seemed like the obvious fit suddenly is not available. Bruce Waltke comments "It is possible to have a definite purpose, feel called, and have the affirmation of other Christians, yet have circumstances prevent you from carrying out your plan."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Waltke, *Finding the Will of God*, 123.

God is sovereign and in both the unexpected joys and unexpected disappointments people must learn to yield and trust in his sovereignty. Gary Friesen states (My trust in God's sovereign guidance) "is expressed in my confidence that God exercises control over all things. It is manifested in my prayer for open doors, and my expectation that He is working all things together for good."<sup>66</sup>

### *Summary*

A student's expectations for how to obtain God's direction in finding the answer to the questions "How can I steward the talents, gifts and passions that God has given me to best serve Him?" is very important. One should not expect a supernatural enunciation. Rather, it is a process of knowing God's moral decrees and how they affect one's decision; then praying for wisdom from God through a journey that includes: evaluating one's talents; getting counsel and insight on the same topic from others; doing personal research into professions that utilize those emerging talents. It is always okay to ask God if he has a specific calling in mind. If God has such a task in mind, one should expect a miraculous explanation. But normally that will not be the case. We are free and expected to make wise decisions with the gifts he has given us and to choose vocations that serve him as best we can, always trusting in his sovereignty as opportunities come and go. Again, Gary Friesen gives a good summary to the pursuit of wisdom and God's direction as expressed in this thesis-project:

If man were to make his decisions as a function of instinct, he would be no different from the animals. If he required direct input from the Creator for every choice, he would be no more than a manipulated robot. By God's design, only the

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<sup>66</sup> Friesen, *Decision Making*, 253.

image-bearer approaches decisions in the same manner as the creator. Within boundaries prescribed by God's own character, man analyzes, evaluates, judges, and freely determines his choices. Only man was given the competence to make free judgments. And only man was given the dignity of bearing full responsibility for the consequences of his choices.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Friesen, *Decision Making*, 173.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **LITERARY REVIEW ON VOCATION DECISION-MAKING**

The approach chosen to discover what others have written on this subject of “making vocational decisions that reflect one’s commitment to Christ” will be to review, compare and discuss previous works done in three sections. The first section of this chapter will be to consider the earliest Christian views of vocation and calling. What have writers, through their research, found to have been the first Christians’ approach to vocations? Though little appears to have been written with regard to any systematic approach by the early church, what is written can lead to an understanding of how one’s commitment to Christ should impact one’s life. This time frame will cover from the first century A.D. through the medieval era.

The second section of this chapter will focus on the impact that the Reformation had on vocational decision-making. The Reformation changed what Christians thought about the sacredness of work. That new understanding continues to mold and inform our current understanding of vocations. However, that understanding has eroded and combined with relatively recent cultural changes, new issues have arisen.

The third section of this chapter will consider contemporary issues that came along with the industrialized age and modern technology, when vocational options abounded, much more so than in previous centuries. This chapter will look at how both secular and Christian writers have addressed the implications of these changes. Much has been written in the last 70 years that is meant to help in vocational planning. The following will be a sampling to determine what is helpful in these writings for the

Christian making career decisions as well as what is detrimental to one's commitment to Christ.

The value in such an approach is well articulated by William Placher when he writes:

To believe that a wise and good God is in charge of things implies that there is a fit between things that need doing and the person I am meant to be. Finding such a fit, I find my calling. Looking back to the wisdom of the Christian tradition can help us think about these issues better. The past does not always have the right answers, but its answers are often at least different from those of the present, and the differences cause us to question our own previously unexamined assumptions. Why do we think X when people used to think Y?<sup>1</sup>

### **Vocational Decision-Making in the Early Church Through the Medieval Times**

Scripture's narrative of the early church is helpful in this piece of our study.

Scripture indicates that new converts were unconcerned with the need to choose the right vocation to serve Christ; they were most preoccupied with the implications of choosing to follow Christ. The apostle's words to them were encouragement to live respectful, moral, loving lives and endure persecution that would come their way because of their faith. Paul tells Timothy "...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."<sup>2</sup> Again to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul exhorts slaves to "obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) 3.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12-13.

Lord, not men...’’<sup>3</sup> Peter would feel led by the Spirit of God to write a letter to be circulated amongst five churches to encourage them in their faith because of persecution they were experiencing:

In this (the salvation and inheritance they received as a result of faith in Christ) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.<sup>4</sup>

An outstanding source of information about the early church’s thoughts on vocations comes from William C. Placher’s book, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Placher, by using source writings of men and women from the first three centuries of the church, has made many interesting observations of those first years in the early church. Placher would agree that the idea of vocational decisions regarding serving God was not even a part of the early church’s thought process. As the church began, it was not long before alignment with Jesus and his followers became a serious decision because of the persecution that would accompany such a decision. The real decision being made at that time was “Should I be a Christian?” and, second, “How public should I be about my Christian faith?”<sup>5</sup>

From the pen of Ignatius (c. 35-107), a Bishop in the city of Antioch in Syria and one who knew Jesus’ first apostles, comes an excerpt that reveals the seriousness of early Christians’ decisions to follow Christ:

Things are off to a good start. May I have the good fortune to meet my fate without interference! What I fear is your generosity, which may prove detrimental to me. For you can easily do what you want to, whereas it is hard for me to get to God unless you let me alone. I do not want you to please men, but to please God, just as you are doing. For I shall never again have such a chance to

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 6:5-7.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1:6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 6.

get to God, nor can you, if you keep quiet, get credit for a finer deed! For if you quietly let me alone, people will see in me God's Word. But if you are enamored of my mere body, I shall, on the contrary, be a meaningless noise. Grant me no more than to be a sacrifice for God while there is an altar at hand.<sup>6</sup>

Another very interesting example of the widespread hatred toward those who chose to follow Christ is found in portions of a writing entitled "Apology" by Tertullian (c. 160-225), a North African convert who wrote to the Roman emperor of the time defending Christians and pointing out the illogical response the empire and its citizens had toward them:

What are we to think of it, that most people so blindly know their heads against the hatred of the Christian name; that when they bear favorable testimony to anyone, they mingle with it abuse of the name he bears? "A good man," says one, "is Gaius Seius, only that he is a Christian." So another, "I am astonished that a wise man like Lucius should have suddenly become a Christian." Nobody thinks it needful to consider whether Gaius is not good and Lucius wise, by the very reason that he is a Christian; or a Christian, for the reason that he is wise and good...

Others, in the case of a person whom, before they took the name of Christian, they had known as loose, and vile, and wicked, put on them a brand from the very thing which they praise. In the blindness of their hatred, they fall foul of their own approving judgment! "What a woman she was! How wanton! How wild! What a youth he was! How profligate! How lustful! – They have become Christians!" So the hated name is given to a reformation of character. Some even barter away their comforts for that hatred, content to bear injury, if they are kept free at home from the object of their bitter enmity. The husband casts his wife out of his house even though she is now chaste and he has no reason for jealousy. The father, who used to be so patient, now disinherits his son even though he is now obedient. The master, once so mild, commands the servant away from his presence even though he is now faithful. It is a high offence for anyone to be reformed by the detested name (of Christian). Goodness is of less value than hatred of Christians...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 102-5. Quoted in Placher, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Apology*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 3:20.

Many historical accounts of persecution of early followers of Christ can be found in *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.<sup>8</sup> The reader will be impressed again with the fact that vocational decisions did not consume the thoughts of early Christians. Being counted worthy to suffer for Christ and to consider the costs of following him were the issues in the forefront of their minds. They were new converts; they were already engaged in labor and jobs. Their thoughts were focused on the reality of how their confession was going to impact their lives.

Another reason for vocational decision-making not being a huge issue in the early church was the lesser amount of career choices available. In much of our world today, at least in prosperous societies, the vast majority of people have numerous options to decide upon when it comes to choosing a career. The age of the early church had very few choices to make and it was quite normal, as Placher points out, that “a peasant’s son became a peasant; a goldsmith’s son joined the goldsmiths’ guild.”

Placher notes that the climate changed for Christians after the first three centuries. When Emperor Constantine made Christianity the recognized religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Christians faced a different problem. Alliance with Christ was no longer a threatening proposition; now it was popular, even socially and politically advantageous, to be a Christian. Converts flooded the church. Because of this, many Christians chose a radical form of self-denial to maintain the sense of ‘picking up one’s cross daily.’ In a sense, many followers of Christ created their own hardships. Monastic movements sprung up where Christians took vows of poverty and celibacy.

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<sup>8</sup> John Foxe, *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. Harold J. Chadwick (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1997).

From Placher's research and writings, one can detect a historical shift from the first four centuries of the church regarding how Christians view vocational decision-making. Over the next one thousand years, it was thought that to use one's life to serve God was synonymous with being a monk, nun or priest. The standard medieval social divisions were divided amongst the religious (monks, nuns, priests), those who fought (the nobles), and those who worked (the peasants). Thus, the central vocational choice for Christians was "Should I stay a part of my family, marrying, having children; or choose the priesthood or the 'religious' life in a convent or a monastery or as a wandering friar."<sup>9</sup>

Let us recall Placher's earlier quote: "The past does not always have the right answers, but its answers are often at least different from those of the present, and the differences cause us to question our own previously unexamined assumptions. Why do we think X when people used to think Y?" Placher suggests three areas with reference to vocations, in which we can learn from this early time in the churches history.

First, today's Christ follower can learn about the "rhythms of life." Today's Christian is more characterized by 'doing' than 'being.' The early church and medieval monks and nuns lived a lifestyle that allowed for a lot of time to contemplate the mysteries of God. Was this done in excess and with legalism? Most would think the answer to be 'yes,' but is that worse than being so busy 'doing' that one takes no time to think deeply about God and pray at length with him?

Second, the vows of moderate to radical poverty cultivated a simple life. Gone were distractions common with possessions and wealth. One was now free to devote oneself to God and to people. Gone also were any wrong motivation or even the

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<sup>9</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 107-111.

perception of wrong motivations that one might have about serving God and people for monetary gain.

Finally, Christians can learn from their example of serving without a focus on the immediate need to improve social conditions. These people made their vows and served God with their eyes fixed on the afterlife. They did not get caught up in ‘the now.’<sup>10</sup> This point made by Placher reflects numerous Biblical passages of exhortations toward this mindset such as Paul’s command to the converts in Colossae to “...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God,” as well as Peter’s words to persecuted believers to “set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Changes in Vocational Thinking as a Result of the Reformation**

As the word suggests, the Reformation was a time when Christianity made a huge paradigm shift. Most would accredit the work of Martin Luther, or better said, the work of God in Martin Luther, as the most glaring cause of the Reformation.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was German born. When it came time to choose a vocation, Luther entered law school, but later dropped out and entered a monastery.<sup>12</sup> Luther’s struggle with earning one’s way to God’s favor versus God bestowing grace upon undeserving mankind changed the church in many ways, including her thinking regarding vocations.

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<sup>10</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 1:13.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, 1483-1546, <http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/martin-luther.html>. [Accessed February 17, 2011].

As a monk, Luther was known for lengthy times of confession and repentance followed by lengthy devotional contemplation. In spite of this, he was still tortured in his soul, wondering if he had done enough and how one could ever know. As a result of studying Paul's letter to the Romans, Luther realized salvation comes only through grace and faith in Christ's work on the cross. God's favor does not come through man's efforts.

This truth transformed Luther, and its ramifications impacted his understanding of work and the futility of the current elitist, hierarchical society of his time. As noted before, in his day, vocationally, one was either amongst those who pray, those who fight, or those who work. His understanding of grace through faith in Christ and not through vows of poverty and personal sacrifice tore down the idea that man's highest spiritual vocation was to be found in devoting one's life to seclusion in a monastery or cloister for undistracted contemplation of God. In fact, Luther would come to believe that the monastic life was not a vocation at all but was actually running from true religion and service to God.<sup>13</sup>

Luther's belief led him to teach that all stations of life (by stations he meant whatever vocation and/or responsibility a person had) were in fact a calling from God. Work done in service to God, regardless of what it was, was a person's vocation, no more or no less important than any other. Lee Hardy in his book, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiring into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work*, writes:

Work itself, then, is a divine vocation. For that reason, when his parishioners wondered what God wanted them to do Luther did not suggest that they abandon

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<sup>13</sup> Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 50.

their worldly occupations and retreat to a monastery, but rather that they conscientiously serve their neighbor within the stations that God had placed them.

...Our vocation, according to Luther, comes to us through our station. What God would have us do with our time and talents is discerned from the duties which pertain to our stations in life together with the concrete opportunities he has placed before us. But what do we accomplish when we discharge the duties of a station life, when we heed the call of God to serve our neighbor in and through our daily tasks? Luther's answer to this question is as astounding as it is humbling: the order of stations in the earthly kingdom has been instituted by God himself as his way of seeing that the needs of humanity are met on a day-to-day basis. Through the human pursuit of vocations across the array of earthly stations the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed, the ignorant are enlightened, and the weak are protected. That is, by working we actually participate in God's ongoing providence for the human race.<sup>14</sup>

Luther would concur with the theological study of this thesis; namely, that work is part of what it means to be created in the image of God, and man is a co-laborer with him, "his hands," as Luther would state it. He went so far as to denounce the monastic movement as a "...withdrawal from one's neighbors into a cloister and thus into a self-centered concern for one's own salvation."<sup>15</sup>

William Placher summarily writes regarding Luther's teaching,

Thanks to God, our salvation is secure. Thus we can serve our neighbors simply to serve our neighbors, without worrying how much we are helping toward our own salvation. Therefore, he argued, no one should feel compelled to enter a monastery or convent and become some sort of super-Christian in order to contribute to one's salvation through works. Rather, we should stick to where God has put us and serve God there.<sup>16</sup>

This new teaching had a sweeping impact on the European societies. Placher continues, "Social changes are rarely more dramatic. Henceforth, at least among Protestants, one could no longer limit the term vocation to some Christians. Every Christian had at least

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<sup>14</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 48-50.

<sup>16</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 205.

two vocations: the call to become part of the people of God... and the call to a particular line of work.”<sup>17</sup>

In *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution*, Steven Ozment stated that around 1520, between six and ten percent of the entire German population was made up of priests, nuns and monks. They had their own courts, they did not pay taxes, and they did not marry. Yet a generation later, those numbers had dropped by two-thirds. Monasteries and convents were almost entirely eliminated.<sup>18</sup> Os Guinness in *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* adds:

For Martin Luther and subsequent reformers, the recovery of the holistic understanding of calling was dramatic. Writing about the “Estate of Marriage” in 1522, Luther declared that God and the angels smile when a man changes a diaper. William Tyndale wrote that, if our desire is to please God, pouring water, washing dishes, cobbling shoes, and preaching the Word “is all on.” William Perkins claimed polishing shoes was a sanctified and holy act. ...Bishop Thomas Becon wrote, “Our Saviour Christ was a carpenter. His apostles were fishermen. St. Paul was a tent-maker.

Perkins’s *A treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men* provides a typical Reformation summary: “The action of a shepherd in keeping sheep, performed as I have said in his kind, is as good a work before God as is the action of a judge in giving sentence, or of a magistrate in ruling, or a minister in preaching.

Calling gave to the endeavor to make Christ Lord of every part of life a fresh force that transformed not only the churches but also the worldviews and cultures of the Reformation countries. Calling gave to the idea of “talents” a new meaning, so that they were no longer seen purely as spiritual gifts and graces but as natural and a matter of giftedness in the modern sense of the term.

It demanded and inspired the transforming vision of the lordship of Christ expressed in the famous saying of the great Dutch Prime Minister, Abraham

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<sup>17</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 206.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The birth of a revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 25-27.

Kuyper: “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’”<sup>19</sup>

Contemporary to Martin Luther, but teaching in Geneva, Switzerland, was lawyer turned teacher and scholar, John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin agreed fully with Luther in most areas. He insisted:

...God claims omnipotence to himself, and would have us to acknowledge it, — not the vain, indolent, slumbering omnipotence which sophists feign, but vigilant, efficacious, energetic, and ever active, — not an omnipotence which may only act as a general principle of confused motion, as in ordering a stream to keep within the channel once prescribed to it, but one which is intent on individual and special movements. God is deemed omnipotent, not because he can act though he may cease or be idle, or because by a general instinct he continues the order of nature previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so overrules all things that nothing happens without his counsel.<sup>20</sup>

Lee Hardy explains Calvin’s understanding of God’s omnipotence and providence was the source of his belief that “we become most Godlike not when we turn away from action, but when we engage in it. For God is not the cold, pure intellect of the pagan philosophers, but a full-fledged person, actively engaged in the governance and redemption of this world. He is the creator and sustainer of the universe.”<sup>21</sup>

Vocational options were still very limited during the Reformation, and no doubt those limited options led to an under-developed teaching by Luther regarding the options of a person’s current vocation or station in life. For Luther, one should stay in whatever station one found themselves and serve God there with all one’s being, as unto Christ Himself. Luther considered each vocation as a high calling from God and direct service to him if done for God’s glory. Further, Luther believed that movement from one’s

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<sup>19</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), 34.

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), I.xvi.3.

<sup>21</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 57.

vocation to another was not what God intended. He felt that “the simple shepherd who wanted to work his way up to being a merchant” was eroding the order of God’s ordained society.<sup>22</sup> In other words, one should stay within the vocation he and his family was providentially born into.<sup>23</sup>

Calvin would land on a different position with regard to the permanence of one’s vocation. Though cautious to teach that one’s desire for vocational change must not be motivated by covetousness, greed or pride, he still recognized “social motion” from one job to another. Calvin based this belief on the fact that God has given all mankind different talents and it is each person’s responsibility to steward those talents in service to God. Lee Hardy writes:

Instead of claiming that God has a place for each person in the order of stations in this life, Calvinists often put it this way: God has given each person certain talents and abilities which they should exercise for their neighbor’s good. Whereas for Luther our vocation is discerned in the duties of our station in life, for the Calvinist it is derived from our gifts. We have a duty to use our talents and abilities for our neighbor’s sake. Therefore we are obliged to find a station in life where our gifts can indeed be employed for the sake of our neighbor’s good.

... For Calvinists, then, it is not so much serving god within the station one finds oneself as it is serving God by one’s station. The station is no longer conceived as a form of life imposed upon one from the outside, but as an instrument of life.<sup>24</sup>

The societal change resulting from the Reformation was enormous. The Protestant Christian worldview at the beginning of the Reformation was that of being born into a station or vocation that was unchangeable. Lest one became a monk or nun or priest, vocation had very little spiritual meaning. During and after the Reformation, all work had meaning and was service to God and therefore each individual’s life gained meaning. Every Christian had some role in God’s overall plan for caring for his creation.

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<sup>22</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 206-207.

<sup>23</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 66-67.

Every man, who desired to serve God from a pure heart, could do so, in part, through his or her vocation.

These changes continued to take root in Protestantism as can be seen in William Law's writings. Educated at Emmanuel College in Cambridge, through a series of events, Law (1686-1761) would be relegated to teaching through his books. In *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Law would write extensively about vocation:

Men of worldly business, therefore, must not look upon themselves as at liberty to live to themselves, to sacrifice to their own humors and tempers, because their employment is of a worldly nature. But they must consider, that, as the world and all worldly professions as truly belong to God, as person and things that are devoted to the altar, so it is as much the duty of men in worldly business to live wholly unto God, as it is the duty of those who are devoted to Divine service.<sup>25</sup>

Law concludes that the entire world belongs to God, including men. They have been given all their faculties from God and are, therefore, obligated to use all their power and faculties for God. Much like Calvin, Law writes, "...men may, and must differ in their employments, but yet they must all act for the same ends, as dutiful servants of God, in the right and pious performance of their several callings."<sup>26</sup>

Like Luther and Calvin before him, Law emphasizes right motivations among Christians as they pursue and carry out their vocations. He likens the proper motivation for vocation to that of giving alms:

...That same state and temper of mind which makes our alms and devotions acceptable, must also make our labor or employment a proper offering unto God. If a man labors to be rich, and pursues his business, that he may raise himself to a state of figure and glory in the world, he is no longer serving god in his employment; he is acting under other masters, and has no more title to a reward from God than he that gives alms that he may be seen, or prays that he may be heard of men. For vain and earthly desires are no more allowable in our employments than in our alms and devotions.

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31. <sup>25</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009),

<sup>26</sup> Law, *A Serious Call*, 32.

...The husbandman that tills the ground is employed in an honest business that is necessary in life and very capable of being made an acceptable service unto God. But if he labors and toils, not to serve any reasonable ends of life, but in order to have his plough made of silver, and to have his horses harnessed gold, the honesty of his employment is lost as to him, and his labor becomes his folly.

A tradesman may justly think that it is agreeable to the will of God for him to sell such things as are innocent and useful in life, such as help both himself and others to a reasonable support, and enable them to assist those that want to be assisted. But if, instead of this, he trades only with regard to himself, without any other rule than that of his own temper; if it be his chief end in it to grow rich, that he may live in figure and indulgence, and to be able to retire from business to idleness and luxury; his trade, as to him, loses all its innocence, and is so far from being an acceptable service to God that it is only a more plausible course of covetousness, self-love, and ambition. ...Now he that is up early and late, that sweats and labors for these ends, that he may be some time or other rich, and live in pleasure and indulgence, lives no more to the glory of God than he that plays and games for the same ends.

...Now the only way to do this is for people to consider their trade as something that they are obliged to devote to the glory of God, something that they are to do only in such a manner as that they may make it a duty to Him. Nothing can be right in business that is not under these rules. The Apostle commands servants to be obedient to their masters “in singleness of heart, as unto Christ. Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but as the servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not to men (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22-23).”<sup>27</sup>

John Wesley (1703-1791), preacher and founder of the Methodist church, would not only agree with this teaching and the resultant societal changes, but would punctuate the emphasis on stewardship of the talents that God has given to all men in his preaching:

...so large a portion of his goods, of various kinds, hath he committed to their charge. But it is not forever, no indeed for any considerable time: we have this trust reposed in us only during the short uncertain space that we sojourn here below, only so long as we remain on earth, as this fleeting breath is in our nostrils. The hour is swiftly approaching; it is just at hand, when we “can be no longer stewards” (Luke 16:2)! The moment the body “returns to the dust as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it” (Ecc. 12:7), we bear that character no more; the time of our stewardship is at an end. Part of those goods wherewith we were before entrusted are now come to an end; at least, they are so with regard to us; nor are we longer entrusted with them: and that part which remains can longer be employed or improved as it was before....

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<sup>27</sup> Law, *A Serious Call*, 34-36.

...Thy Lord will farther inquire, “Hast thou been a wise and faithful steward with regard to the talents of a mixed nature which I lent thee? Didst thou employ thy health and strength, not in folly or sin, not in the pleasures which perished in the using, ‘not in making provision for the flesh, to fulfill the desires thereof’ (Romans 13:14), but in a vigorous pursuit of that better part which none could take away from thee? Didst thou employ whatever was pleasing in thy person or address, whatever advantages thou had by education, whatever share of learning, whatever knowledge of things or men, was committed to thee, for the promoting of virtue in the world, for the enlargement of my kingdom? Did thou employ whatever share of power thou had, whatever influence over others, by the love or esteem of thee which they had conceived, for the increase of their wisdom and holiness? Didst thou employ that inestimable talent of time, with wariness and circumspection, as duly weighing the value of every moment, and knowing that all were numbered in eternity?”<sup>28</sup>

Such was the impact of the Reformation upon Christendom concerning the issue of vocations. As compared to the early followers of Christ whose main concern was the cost of aligning oneself with Christ, and the Medieval followers of Christ who had come to believe that only monk, nuns and priests really vocationally served God, the post-reformation Christian correctly sees their vocation as one of the means by which service to God is rendered.

### **Current Trends in Vocation Decision-Making**

#### **Myriad of Choices and Yet so Many are Unfulfilling**

Changes again, in parts of the world since the Reformation, have impacted vocational decision-making. As much of the world and especially the new nation of the United States of America moved into the industrial age in the 1800’s, vocations became much more numerous. Prior to the industrial age, families worked together and produced together, and the family business was kept in the family. With the event of the industrial

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<sup>28</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 6, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 4:139-140, 147.

age, the father became the breadwinner as jobs moved away from the farms and small home-based businesses to factories. New pressure befell men. Where once the whole family worked together, now the man ventured into the world alone. His success and failure now became much more his own cross to bear, and it had immediate impact on the entire family. As never before, fathers became sole financial providers.<sup>29</sup>

Needless to say, these conditions impacted how Christians chose vocations. Though Christians were freed from the narrow and wrong beliefs existing prior to the reformation (that only monks, nuns and priests vocationally served God), now the actual vocational decision became more of an issue. Believers had numerous options and could consider how to steward their gifts to best serve God. These options exist in abundance like never before for young people today. The sheer number of options can feel overwhelming to merging adults. “How does one find which path is right?” writes Douglas Brouwer and then continues, “The right answer is that you can’t. Life doesn’t work that way. You won’t know at twenty five. But you’ll be working your way toward knowing.”<sup>30</sup>

The industrial age, with all its good, also brought an increase of a dilemma that has probably always existed, but never to the extent now experienced; namely, with an assembly line approach to manufacturing goods, personal fulfillment in jobs became and continues to be many laborers’ struggle. How exciting and fulfilling can it be to wake up each morning to drill the same hole on a piece of metal passing by and repeating that action hundreds of times a day; or standing in a line picking out the bad tomato on the

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<sup>29</sup> Diana Garland, *Family Ministry – A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 262-263.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas J. Brouwer, *What am I supposed to do with my life?: Asking the Right Question*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 26-27.

conveyor belt all day long; or welding the same part on a car every day of every year; or filling out the same paperwork for home loan purchasers day after day after day? The sense of serving God in a meaningful way is very difficult in such situations.

Feel the tension between the following two statements made by authors who are both stating truthful claims. Douglas Brouwer captures the excitement of serving God through one's career with the following thoughts:

(As a Christian) I was told ...that you're pursuing your calling or vocation in life – in other words, what God saved you for. Your life has been altered and claimed and redirected. You're not living for yourself anymore; you're living for God who loves you and, in a sense, needs you. God expects to work through you. God's work will be accomplished –in part – through you.

...when I think about vocation I think about something bigger than just what I could come up with. I think about... well, I think about God. I think about God's plan. I think about how I might fit into that plan and be a part of it and participate meaningfully in it. I think about God calling me beyond myself to places I would never have considered on my own. That kind of call is so powerful and filled with purpose that it can only come from outside me.”<sup>31</sup>

And so it is, as discussed in this Chapter as well as Chapter 2, that Christ's followers participate in God's care for his creation through all of our careers; the farmer as well as the electrician, the grocery clerk as well as the doctor, the engineer as well as the teacher. Following Christ should, and must, motivate Christians to see themselves as participants in God's care for his creation through their callings. Thus we can say along with Luther, “That God milks the cows through the milkmaids.”<sup>32</sup>

Douglas Schurrman captures the tension between this exciting co-laboring with God and the many vocations that do not seem to capture our imagination or sense of

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<sup>31</sup> Brouwer, *What Am I Supposed to Do*, 7, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Schurrman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 7.

working alongside God because of the meaninglessness or mindless repetition or worldly focus of many careers:

Can life be experienced as a response to divine calling when our economic system stresses the exchange value of work and seems to dominate other contexts such as family, politics, and education? Is it yet possible to perceive God's call in and through labor made repetitive, boring, competitive, and inhuman by the demands of technology or industry, or when that labor serves (often without or against our wills) to exacerbate the poverty of others?<sup>33</sup>

Schurrman explains that Christians used to be so much more involved in leadership of most institutions (medical, education, political) and this gave spiritual meaning to such jobs. Now they are government or privately run, and as such, lack the spiritual element and steal much of the sense of meaning from the vocation. It is the same in choosing a college; now it's a cost-benefit choice of what school will land a person the most prestigious and lucrative job, not what college will prepare them to use their God-given gifts to serve him best. Schurrman continues:

Add to these already powerful economic and social influences the cultural forces involving systematic exclusion of Christianity from public education, a pervasive moral individualism in the service of self-expression, the dominance of a 'scientific' view of nature and a managerial view of social relations – and the religious (caretaking) value of life as vocation become exceedingly difficult to sustain. Is it a wonder why so many people find it difficult to see their lives as permeated with a sense of God and religious significance? ...Can it be a divine calling to work for an enterprise that appears to have either no connection to the common good or a deleterious effect upon it?"<sup>34</sup>

Modern day Christians must contemplate how they can best serve God in choosing their vocation when there are so many choices presented to them. Many of the choices seem to have little or no sense of fulfillment because of a lack of need for creative, skillful giftedness.

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<sup>33</sup> Schurrman, *Vocation*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Schurrman, *Vocation*, 8, 11-12.

## Vocational Idolatry

Another shift in vocational thinking is making one's vocation an idol. Idolatry can take on many forms. For some, the idolatry is plain and simple wealth. The Bible is filled with warnings of how wealth can sink its talons into our heart and become one's God. Paul warns his young disciple Timothy that the love of money is the source of all evil.<sup>35</sup> Jesus confronts a certain rich young man who apparently ceases to follow the Son of God when challenged with his love for his wealth.<sup>36</sup> James, the brother of Jesus, blasts his rich readers for the unjust dealings with their employees. Their oppressive and unfair employment practices are motivated by monetary idolatry.<sup>37</sup> Other forms of vocational idolatry can include choosing a career to bolster one's image; grasp for power and status; and maybe the most self-serving and idolatrous motive – to find self fulfillment and pleasure. That is not to say that stewarding one's talents in service of the Lord will not bring fulfillment and pleasure, but if vocational decision-making motivation changes from 'stewardship of talents in service of the Lord' to 'use of talents to serve oneself,' then the vocation will become an idol.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the bulk of society's counsel will wittingly or unwittingly lead our young people in the direction of making vocations an idol. Carol Christen and Richard Bolles have written a very 'mechanically' useful book to help high school students make career decisions. The book is entitled *What Color is Your Parachute?: For Teens – Discovering Yourself, Defining Your Future*. 'Mechanically useful' is a reference to good processes that will help a young person discover their

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 19:16-24.

<sup>37</sup> James 5:1-6.

talents and interests, how to identify careers that utilize them, and how to get the most out of high school and college to prepare for the identified careers. This book's predecessor, *What Color is Your Parachute*, written for adults, has been a best seller for years and updated numerous times to keep pace with the changes of society, especially technology. Both books are laid out in a very useful step-by-step format.

The detrimental aspect of each book is the motivation from which the book is written. From the very first pages, one can easily see a worldly, selfish, and idolatrous approach to vocational decision-making:

This book is about you – and your future – which is, of course, a very fascinating subject!... most likely, you're becoming aware that some adults you know – teachers, parents, coaches, and others – really enjoy what they're doing, and others don't. We want to help you find work that you'll enjoy – work that's fun, satisfying, and challenging, all rolled into one....we'll help you discover just what kind of job will be a good and satisfying one for you. You'll learn what you need to know about yourself and about the world of work so that you can make good choices about how you want to live and work. Why did we write this book? We want you to find work that you love or build a life you love through work you enjoy.”<sup>38</sup>

Had Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Apostle Paul, or Jesus written this paragraph, it would undoubtedly read more as follows:

This book is about you – and your future – which is, of course, really about how God created you and it's a very fascinating subject! Most likely, you're becoming aware that some adults you know – teachers, parents, coaches, and others – really enjoy what they're doing, and others do not. We want to help you find which careers match the talents God has given you; professions that steward those gifts well for His purposes and glory. You will undoubtedly enjoy the work you choose because you'll be functioning the way God created you. But that's not the real issue. The real issue is discovering those talents that he gave you and then being a steward of them for his purposes. This is how you will experience real joy: serving God, for his glory and kingdom, with the talents he entrusted to you. You will learn what you need to know about yourself and about the world of work so that you can make good choices about how God wants you to live and work. Why did we write this book? We want you to serve God to the best of your

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<sup>38</sup> Christen, and Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute*, 1-3.

abilities as you are discovering the talents he's given you and then begin using them well for his glory.

Such would be the difference because it is the difference between career decision-making that focuses on how God has created a person and how they can best serve him, versus the world's philosophy that all of life is about mankind's personal fulfillment. One author wrote that "the advantages of choosing a career that fits you perfectly" are success, enjoyment, personal attractiveness (being satisfied makes one more attractive to others), good relationships (people who like their jobs feel good about themselves and choose friends who make them feel good about themselves), self-expression, self-esteem, health and vitality.<sup>39</sup>

The mechanics of these books are helpful, but the underlying philosophy is destructively idolatrous. We must teach our students how to use good processes but with the right motives. The philosophy of our world will not teach them right motives. Os Guinness' words ring true here, "Most of us, whether we are aware of it or not, do things with an eye to the approval of some audience or other. The question is not whether we have an audience but which audience we have. ...A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all the others – the audience of one."<sup>40</sup> Lee Hardy also calls us away from idolatrous motives with these words:

...job satisfaction (cannot) serve as an infallible guide to the right occupation. Much is made these days of self-fulfillment. ...When it comes to work, we are inclined to think that jobs exist primarily for our sake, to assist us in the realization of our selves. That is what we expect from a good job. If it happens that others are served or edified in the process, then so be it – we will count it as a happy by-product. ... The Christian understanding of work does not deny that job satisfaction is a good and valuable thing. But job satisfaction cannot, for the Christian, serve as the sole or even primary criterion by which a job is evaluated.

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<sup>39</sup> Lore, *Now What?*, 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 73.

For an occupation must be first considered in terms of how it provides a fitting place for the exercise of one's gifts in the service of others.<sup>41</sup>

Fredrick Buechner shares these same sentiments:

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this: the kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work a) that you need most to do and 2) that the world most needs to have done.<sup>42</sup>

None of this is new. Mankind has struggled with serving himself over and against serving his Creator ever since the fall. Christ has come and redeemed mankind; bought us back from the ignorant life of sin to a relationship with himself where people can once again fulfill the purposes for which he created us – even in the area of vocations.

### **The Contemporary Voices That are Pleading with Christians to Make Vocational Decisions That Reflect Their Commitment to Jesus Christ**

In talking to Keith Davis, the head of International Assistance Programs, a ministry that mobilizes businessmen to use their business skills in various missions endeavors, Keith stated that Billy Graham believes the next great revival will happen in the marketplace, as Christians live out their faith in Christ in everyday events of their jobs and speak of him amongst their coworkers.<sup>43</sup> John Piper dedicated an entire chapter in his book *Don't Waste your Life* to the subject of vocations. He makes a vital point in saying, "The Bible makes it plain that God's will is for his people to be scattered like salt and light among the whole range of secular vocations. Enclaves of Christians living only

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<sup>41</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric of Life*, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Fredrick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 95.

<sup>43</sup> Keith Davis, Interviewed by author. Spokane, WA. February 27, 2011.

with Christians and working only with Christians would not accomplish God's whole purpose in the world."<sup>44</sup> Os Guinness adds to this topic with comments such as "Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and foremost we are called to someone (God), not to something (motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia)." Guinness goes on to say that our second calling "is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him."<sup>45</sup> The voices, the theologians, are present much like their Reformation predecessors, calling God's people to see their vocations as an essential aspect of their commitment to follow Christ. High school students are standing on the edge of the vocational pool, preparing to jump in to the water of careers that can either serve themselves or serve our God.

Not surprisingly, the actual wisdom given regarding the process of vocational decision-making does not differ substantially among these Christian leaders who speak to this issue. The process itself is quite simple in explanation yet takes a huge amount of effort to move through and in fact will continue on through one's entire life.

## **Good Vocational Decision-Making**

### **Assessing One's Talents**

Writers agree that the starting point for vocational identification is assessing one's talents. Talents are not found in a person by chance. A high school student begins his or

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<sup>44</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 133.

<sup>45</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 31.

her actual career path search by beginning to understand how God has made them. Whereas the first century Christians were focused on the implications of following Christ, and medieval Christians thought they could only serve God as monks and nuns, and post-Reformation Christians realized their work was a sacred service to God, it really is, for the first time, the privilege and freedom and responsibility of the modern Christian in prosperous countries to consider how God has wired them. So Guinness comments: “God normally calls us along the lines of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service, not selfishness.” He completes his statement explaining that our thinking ought to be that ‘we do what we are,’ not that ‘we are what we do.’<sup>46</sup> People need to discover what talents God has woven into them that makes them who they are and then use those talents, passions and personalities in vocations with a fixed eye on how they can serve him through that vocation. God has equipped us to do what he wants us to do. He may do much more through a person than they are equipped to do, but that would be his doing, and the result will then teeter on being miraculous.

The identification of one’s talents is neither an easy task nor a one-time discovery. Agreeing that talent identification is the mechanical starting point in vocational pursuits, Lee Hardy comments:

...Two practical items immediately arise: the gifts God has given to me, and the exercise of those gifts for the sake of others. ...If several occupational options lie before me, and they all look equally valid and interesting, rather than allowing myself to be paralyzed by the lack of a deciding factor, it would be better simply to choose one and pursue it. In the course of pursuing that occupation I will inevitably learn something I couldn’t have known prior to its pursuit. I may become convinced that I had in fact made the right choice. On the other hand, I might find out in no uncertain terms that I made the “wrong” choice. Not to worry. I can still benefit from that. I have learned something about myself. And I can cross one occupation option off my list.

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<sup>46</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 46.

Besides, career decisions are rarely irrevocable. Most people nowadays go through four or five career changes in the course of a lifetime. ... Career paths are rarely straight.... We cannot know everything before we act. An element of trial and error is unavoidable in the carving out of a niche for oneself in the world of work.<sup>47</sup>

### Attaining the Wisdom of Others

Seeking wisdom from others is the next commonly cited part of the process. One writer keenly articulates that we humans have an innate talent for self-deception.<sup>48</sup> This would be true both in motivation and in abilities. Again from the pen of Lee Hardy, “I may be convinced that God has especially called me to a particular occupation. But do others recognize in me the gifts I think I possess?”<sup>49</sup>

Sittser, Waltke and Friesen in their individual books cited in the previous chapter also agree that seeking out the wisdom of others is an essential part of the decision-making process. Again, their conclusions are rooted in a careful study of Scripture as well as common sense. Their experiences in life match Scripture’s teaching that we need to seek the counsel of others in arriving at an accurate understanding of the talents God has given us.

### How Various Vocations Serve Others

Another oft recognized part of the vocation decision-making process is in evaluating how different vocations serve God’s world, purposes and people. To this

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<sup>47</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric*, 87-88.

<sup>48</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric*, 44.

point John Piper is especially articulate. Piper believes that we are to glorify Christ through our vocations and can do so through:

1. The fellowship we have with Christ throughout the day while working.
2. Taking what God has made and shaping it and using it to make him look great.
3. Do our work in such a manner as to bring glory to God and the gospel. “The way we do our secular work can increase or decrease the attractiveness of the Gospel. ...good, honest work is not the saving Gospel of God, but a crooked Christian salesman is a blemish on the Gospel and puts a roadblock in the way of seeing the beauty of Christ.”
4. Earning enough money to keep us from depending upon others, and yet not focusing on the money but on the good our work is doing for others.
5. Earning enough money to help others and in so doing make them “glad in God.”
6. Sharing the words of the Gospel and practical deeds of help with those with whom we work.<sup>50</sup>

Hardy adds to what Piper says by encouraging Christians to be very specific in the type of career chosen so as to measure and evaluate the social content of one’s vocational pursuits. In other words, which vocations serve as the hands of God best in people’s lives?

Simply having the right attitude, the “Christian attitude,” towards one’s work is not enough. One must also take into consideration the social content of one’s work: am I, in my job, making a positive contribution to the human community; am I helping to meet legitimate human needs; am I somehow enhancing or promoting what is true, what is noble and what is worthy in human life?<sup>51</sup>

In his book, *Here I am: Now What on Earth Should I be Doing?*, Quentin Schultze echoes Hardy’s sentiments in his definition of a vocation: “to be caring followers of Jesus Christ who faithfully love God, neighbor and self. God calls each of us to this overall task of caring for his world. In a broad sense, this caretaking is our vocation as Jesus’

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<sup>50</sup> Piper, *Don’t Waste*, 135-154.

<sup>51</sup> Hardy, *The Fabric*, 95.

ambassadors on earth.”<sup>52</sup> One can see that Schurrman also agrees when he encourages Christians not to default to being a pastor or missionary, but suggests that being a painter that hires others with a livable wage and maybe even hires higher-risk people as a way to redeem their lives may be the greatest need and the best way for a person to use their talents.<sup>53</sup>

Contemporary Christian writers, who are addressing vocational decision-making, seem all to be in agreement that: First, Christians must see themselves as servants of God. Second, Christians need to investigate what specific talents God has given them with which to serve him. Finally, Christians must steward those gifts to be the hands of God in the care of his creation. When laced together, these writers would agree with the premise of this thesis: A Christian high school student’s vocational decision-making must reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ.

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<sup>52</sup> Quentin Schultze, *Here I am: Now What on Earth Should I be Doing?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Schurrman, *Vocation*, 140.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PROJECT DESIGN: TEACHING, MODELING, AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT IMPLEMENTATION**

The strategy proposed to lead the high school students at Northview Bible Church to make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ consisted of the integrated experiences of direction from God's Word and extensive exposure to adults who consider their vocation an aspect of their devotion to Christ.

Three methods of ascertaining whether students understood and embraced the goal of this project were utilized. The first method was to structure all teaching and exposure to adult professionals with opportunities to include immediate response in large and small group settings. The second method consisted of a survey conducted with students. The third method was through open discussion in focus groups. This chapter will begin with a brief description of the setting where teaching took place. The content of the teaching was an appropriate adaptation of materials found in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis-project and will not be repeated.

#### **Direction from God's Word**

##### **The Theology of Work:**

##### **A Study Presented During the 2009 High School Missions Trip**

The project spanned an entire year and began on an eight day summer mission trip on July 18<sup>th</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> of 2009. Twenty-six high school students were in attendance on this mission. The trip consisted of five months of training, during which time the students learned and practiced various aspects of leading a Vacation Bible School: e.g. teaching

the Bible lessons, teaching through crafts, puppets and skits, leading games and songs, and building props.

Once trained, the group from NBC headed for McCall, Idaho, a small town in the Payette National Forest in the State of Idaho. During the mornings the students led the VBS. In the afternoon, each student had one hour to individually complete a previously prepared study on the Bible's teaching regarding "work." After free time in the afternoon and dinner, the group sat down and shared what they had learned from the study on work. Further instruction and discussion took place at this time. It was during these eight days that the Biblical content discussed in chapter two of this thesis regarding a theology of work was delivered and discussed.

Students appear to have grasped the material well. For some, it was the first time they had heard any of the information presented, and they were rather surprised that the Bible was so practical and also that God was so demanding. For others, it broadened and built upon their current understanding of the subject. It should be noted as well that these twenty-six students represented roughly one half of the regular members of the NBC high school group. In other words, half of the regular attendees at NBC's high school group did not get this teaching. Anticipating this, six weeks after the trip and as the new school year began; a two-week recap of the materials covered during the trip was given to the entire group in hopes of getting some of the material to those who did not attend.

## How God Gives Direction:

### A Study Presented at the 2010 High School Winter Retreat

In order to get further direction from God's word in vocational decision-making, another topic studied took place at the NBC winter high school retreat on February 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> of 2010. The theme of the retreat was "How does God give us guidance in our lives?" Having studied God's word on vocations and stewardship of the talents he has endowed students with, this was a necessary question the students needed to wrestle. Over the three days of the winter retreat, the contents of chapter two, regarding how God gives direction, were presented and applied over four different teaching sessions.

### Summary of Materials Presented to Student and Their Parents

Not all students had been able to attend the events when the elements of this project were presented. Believing that students need the help of their families in this decision-making process, a five week summary class was taught that included parents and the students. This interactive class took place during the Sunday school hour in the summer of 2010, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, July 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. No new material was presented at this time. Rather, this was a way to review the material covered and to do so as entire families.

### **Exposure to Adult Professionals**

Though the teaching was very practical and concise, as is often the case in teaching, there existed a significant gap between the student's head knowledge that God would want them to steward the gifts he had endowed them with into their future career

and (here is the gap) what that would actually look like in most occupations. Knowing this gap would exist led to the second aspect of this thesis-project: interviews with adults who intentionally steward their talents to serve God in a variety of occupations.

Interviews took place on the first Tuesday night of each month (Tuesdays are NBC's regular high school youth group night) for ten consecutive months, from October through July. On each of these Tuesdays, adults representing various vocations came and shared with the students how they use the talents God gave them in carrying out their particular careers. The adults were given six questions ahead of time that would be asked of them in interview fashion over the course of the night. These questions related directly to the study that had been completed over the summer on the ministry trip. They are as follows:

1. How and when did you come to follow Jesus Christ?
2. What is your occupation? Describe the kinds of "tasks" you do in a given day/week. Describe some of the journey that led you to this occupation, such as: What colleges did you attend and why? What was your initial major and did this change during your college years? What factors led to any mid-course changes you made?
3. Do you predominately consider your job a burden? Why or why not?
4. What are the talents and abilities you believe God has given you, and how are you stewarding those gifts through your vocation to do your part in serving God and His purposes on earth?
5. How do you see your work as an extension of God's work? For example: How does your vocation serve people and meet their real needs? Has your vocation been an opportunity to demonstrate and talk about the wisdom and ways of God? How does your vocation meet the needs of your own family? What types of opportunities to support and help others has your paycheck given you?
6. How does your relationship with Jesus Christ affect the quality of the work you do and the passion that you bring to your vocation? Why?

Having these same six questions asked of each adult was intended to help the students hear how different people work through these important issues in their specific

occupations and to frequently reiterate the truth that their vocational decisions should reflect their commitment to Christ.

Occupations represented over the ten month period included: a university professor; a high school counselor who also coached in two different sports; a realtor; a beautician; a physician's assistant; an owner of a jewelry business; a homeschooling mother who also has a home business; a nurse; a college student in the final year of preparation for being a missionary pilot; and a marketing manager for a large-chain warehouse store who also was in the process of planting a church. All of the students commented on how helpful it was to hear how these professionals used their talents and passions in such a manner as to serve God and his creation. It put "meat on the bones" so to speak.

### **Methodology for Determining Student Understanding and Implementation**

The final aspect of the thesis-project was retrieving information from the students regarding what they felt they had learned from this concentrated emphasis of making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ. Information was retrieved through a voluntary survey and voluntary participation in focus group discussions.

After completion of the survey, over a month's time, focus groups met to further discuss what they learned, ask any questions, or give any input they would like regarding this thesis-project. The focus groups were divided into three separate groups by the current grade level of the students during the year the project took place; one with the class of 2013, one with the combined classes of 2012 and 2011, one with the class of

2010. The class of 2014, though included in the survey, was not included in focus groups since they had not been exposed to any elements of the thesis-project.

Because the teaching aspect of this project was the content of chapters two and three, the remainder of this chapter will fully cover the second and third aspects of this thesis-project. First, a summary of the information shared by the adults who were interviewed will be given. Their insights were substantial and are most likely reflected in some of the student responses in the surveys and focus groups. Second will be the information gathered from the students in the surveys and focus groups.

### **The Interviews**

As mentioned previously, all ten adults were asked the same six questions. They received these questions ahead of time. As a result, some came with notes, and all came having had time to ponder the questions prior to the personal interview held in the presence of the students. Reflecting back on the answers that were shared by those being interviewed, the following are key insights shared either by individual adults or answers so often repeated by the adults that they warrant recording in this chapter. Each night's interview was followed by small group interaction with students being asked to share with youth staff and peers what was most useful for them from the night's interview along with one or two additional questions pertinent to the topic. After each adult shared their personal story of how they came to be a follower of Jesus Christ (question number one), the interview then proceeded through the remaining five questions.

The second question asked each adult interviewed was: What is your occupation? Describe some of the journey that led you to this occupation and the tasks you do in a given day.

Surprisingly, it was the consistent response to this question that encouraged the high school students the most. Almost every person interviewed shared that the journey to their current occupation was an unexpected, winding road. Some of the curves and turns were the result of them becoming followers of Christ, some were “chance” meetings with individuals who gave them advice on use of their gifts and education, some were the result of meeting the person who would become their spouse, and some curves came through doors that closed abruptly in their faces.

Roger Mohrlang<sup>1</sup>, a university professor, was studying physics at the time when a Christian professor at the college “asked me if I was a Christian, and followed it up by talking to me about the gospel. He was also the one who first encouraged me seriously to read and study the Bible throughout my university years. He eventually lost his job because of his open witness to Christ on this secular campus.”<sup>2</sup> Becoming a Christian changed the course of Roger’s life and led him away from Physics and into missions work in Kenya. There he did Bible translation, translating the New Testament into the Kamwe language, and continuing his education at Fuller Theological Seminary, eventually receiving his PHD at Oxford University. Roger has been a university professor at the same college for 33 years teaching Biblical studies. What particularly struck the students was the 180 degree directional change Roger made in vocational pursuit while in college. The reason for his change was inspiring, but the frank response

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<sup>1</sup> All names and quotes from people interviewed are used with written consent of each person.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Mohrlang, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, September 29, 2009.

of the students was how encouraged they were that they didn't have to have everything completely figured out about their future vocation prior to entering college. This theme would continue with additional interviews.

Dave Vaughn, a local high school counselor and coach in both baseball and wrestling was on an educational track to become a Youth Pastor. Dave recalled for our NBC students:

I was set to declare a major in Youth Ministries. Less than 100 feet from the office where I was to turn it in (the paperwork for declaring his major) and meet with an associate dean to make it official, a long-time, well respected teacher and coach stopped me to briefly talk. I told him what I was doing and he immediately talked about the need for Christian teachers and coaches, sharing the impact they can have on young lives. As he was talking, I knew this was what the Lord wanted me to do. I then moved ahead with degree requirements toward K-12 education.

Dave's story was inspiring, but again the "take home" and encouragement for many students was that they didn't have to have everything figured out about their future education and vocation by the day they graduated from high school. From small group discussion after each interview, students expressed seeing a pattern of how initial vocational decisions (that later changed) were not wasted choices but were often part of the journey to a destination unforeseeable at the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

Val Ferderer, a homeschooling mother, was a Legal Secretary at a top firm in Portland, Oregon, when her vocational aspirations changed. She told the students of her journey:

My journey as a homeschooling mom began with the birth of our first son, Benjamin. I was overwhelmed by this new experience of motherhood – an overwhelming bond of love and a strong desire to instill in him a deep love for the Lord. As I heard about the concept of homeschooling, I came to the conclusion that this would be the most likely vehicle with which to accomplish my goals as a mother to truly disciple my child.

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<sup>3</sup> Dave Vaughn, interview by author, Spokane, WA, October 27, 2009.

The students heard it again; the destination for which these adults started is not where they ended. The journey was full of surprises that could not be anticipated. Six out of the ten adults interviewed had stories that revealed this pattern. Students communicated both relief and excitement about their own coming journey. One more example is worthy of mentioning.

Sean Culver, an employee at a large retail chain, had every intention of being a pastor as his father had been. Sean told the students:

After completing my degree, I needed to stay in Spokane while my wife finished her degree. I was certain I would get a youth pastor job in Spokane. I even had an interview that went very well, but the person who was leaving ending up staying and I was not able to be hired. I had to go to plan B. I applied for a retail job hoping to work there (or anywhere) for a few years. I will have been working for this company eleven years this spring. My second “occupation” is not paid, but is a significant responsibility and is in my field of study. I pastor a church called Overflow that began 13 months ago.<sup>4</sup>

The interviews continued with students hearing adults testify that the vocational decisions they make now need to reflect their commitment to Christ; the journey will not necessarily be in a straight line, but in God’s providential care and direction, he will use every part of the journey to serve his good purposes for those who love him.

The third question asked each adult interviewed was: Do you predominately consider your job a burden? Why or why not?

Roger Mohrlang, our university professor, called his job a delight. “I love working with students, and consider my work a ministry. I am constantly engaged with things that have eternal value.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sean Culver, interview by author, Spokane, WA, April 6, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Mohrlang, Roger, 2009.

Dottie Mohrlang, Roger's wife and also a faculty member at the same university in the Religion Department, said that there are moments of frustration and tiredness at which time she'd rather be at home reading a book or gardening. "Then I think about the wonderful job I have, the wonder of watching people grow in Christ, the wonderful people I work with, the sense of purpose that Christ fills me with, the amazement of seeing His Spirit work in people's lives..." Dottie doesn't have to finish her explanation; the students can see her joy.<sup>6</sup>

CJ Pounder, owner of a jewelry store in Spokane, Washington, loves his job. He cites long hours, difficult decisions, and tedious responsibilities as that which can sometimes feel like a burden. However, overall, he sees his job as serving God and people. Question five will draw out how his career choice reflects his commitment to Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Beautician, Kim Leland, describes herself as a Christian counselor who just happens to send people away looking pretty. She loves her work.<sup>8</sup> Physician's Assistant, Joe Nadeau, finds his work very demanding but not burdensome. He has not lost his interest in anatomy, medicine, or helping people get well.<sup>9</sup>

Dave Vaughn, our high school counselor and coach tells the students "My job is hard and often leaves me spent emotionally, spiritually, and even physically, but I love it as much as I did twenty-six years ago. Honestly, I see my job as a privilege, knowing that I have been placed in a strategic place. ... I am humbled that the Lord Jesus has

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<sup>6</sup> Dottie Mohrlang, interview by author, Spokane, WA, September 29, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> CJ Pounder, interview by author, Spokane, WA, March 2, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Leland, interview by author, Spokane, WA, December 1, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Joe Nadeau, interview by author, Spokane, WA, January 26, 2010.

allowed me to be where I am.”<sup>10</sup> Sean Culver wishes he could be the full-time pastor of the newly planted church, but does not consider his retail job a burden.<sup>11</sup>

Not one person interviewed saw their career as predominately a burden. They acknowledged aspects that were difficult and sometimes exhausting, but all agreed their vocations are part of how they are serving the Lord and people and ultimately find great meaning in their work. This point is not missed by the students in post-interview debriefing. A student aspiring to be a cosmetologist is inspired by Kim’s description of herself as a “Christian counselor who just happens to send people away looking pretty.” A student aiming at a business degree states how much he’d like to work for “Mr. Pounder” and operate his business as CJ does. Physician’s Assistant, Joe Nadeau, received a request for a job shadow from one of our students. The older the student, the more interest was shown.

The fourth question asked each adult interviewed was: What are the talents and abilities you believe God has given you, and how are you stewarding those gifts through your vocation to do your part in serving him and his purposes on earth? Table one on page 86 gives a summary response from all adult participants.

Many of those interviewed had not gone through a Christ-centered decision-making process when choosing colleges or even professions. It was later in life, as they themselves grew in their own commitment to Christ, that they realized every area of their life needed to reflect their commitment to Christ, including their vocations. This realization caused some to change how they approached their vocation so that it did become a way of serving God. For instance, Kim Leland was first interested in

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<sup>10</sup> Vaughn, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Culver, 2010.

cosmetology, but it was later as she grew in her commitment to follow Jesus Christ that she realized and capitalized on the chance to serve Christ by speaking about him and his ways to her customers.<sup>12</sup> Bryce Fonda had originally desired to be a fighter pilot. Health issues disqualified him from the military, but later he realized his desire to fly planes could be a unique way of serving God and his people as a missionary pilot.<sup>13</sup> Val Ferderer did not pursue a college degree in education in order to be a homeschooling mother. It was later in her own spiritual growth as a follower of Christ that she “used the talents God gave me” to serve him well as a homeschooling mother of three children.<sup>14</sup>

Again, the purpose of this project is to lead Northview’s students to make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ. This question and the answers of those interviewed gave objective examples of what this looks like and how our relationship with Christ is not to be trapped in one compartment of our existence: saved for Sundays, camp highs and meal-time prayers. Rather, our entire lives are to reflect “Christ in you (us), the hope of glory.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kim Leland, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Bryce Fonda, interview by author, Spokane, WA, June 1, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Val Ferderer, interview by author, Spokane, WA, May 4, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Colossians 1:27

Name	Occupation	Gifts Needed	Stewardship of Those Gifts Through Career
Candy Smith	Nurse		Excellent medical care of patients. Prayer for patients. Talks to patients about Christ.
Dave Vaughn	High school counselor and coach	Love for kids, encourager, writing, speaking and organizational skills	Help students in career preparation. Special love for kids from hard backgrounds and openly shares Christ.
Val Ferderer	Homeschooling mom	Ability to study and prepare, patience, disciple	The discipling of my three kids to serve God well.
Roger Mohrlang	University professor	Teaching, working with students, intellectual gifts for academic work and Bible translation	Teaching God's truth, teaching academic skills so that students can teach God's truth. Bible translation.
Sean Culver	Retail employment; Pastor of Overflow	People person, leadership, teaching, vision casting	Careful service to customers. Spiritual shepherding as pastor.
Dottie Mohrlang	Associate Director of Certificate of Ministry Program, at local University	Administration, listening, love for people, heart for what God is doing around the world, Biblical and theological knowledge	Administration of internships. Helping to bring people to maturity in Christ.
John Leland	Realtor	People person, administration.	Helping people find a home that meets their real needs. Sharing Christ with colleagues.
Kim Leland	Beautician	Creativity, good listener, wisdom, encourager	Serve people well in excellence of my craft. Bring God's wisdom to client's lives as we talk.
Joe Nadeau	Physicians Assistant	Interest in and aptitude for medical field, compassion, discernment	Excellent care for people and their health. Praying with patients. Sharing Christ's care for them at a time when they feel vulnerable.
CJ Pounder	Business Owner	Organization, management skills, people skills	Providing excellent service to people. Christ-like care for my employees.
Bryce Fonda	Final training for Missionary Aviation	Mechanical aptitude, quick decision-making skills, math skills, study skills – both for flight and for Bible exposition	Resourcing missionaries on the field with physical and spiritual needs.

Table 1. Talents and gifts needed for occupations of adults interviewed.

The fifth question, or set of questions, asked each adult was: How do you see your vocation as an extension of God's work? For example: how does your vocation serve people and meet their real needs? Has your vocation been an opportunity to show and talk about the wisdom and ways of God? How does your vocation meet the needs of your own family? What kinds of opportunities to support/help others has your paycheck given you?

Question number five was meant to be more precise in explaining how the ten adults saw their vocation as serving Christ and his creation. This fuller question fleshed out some of the specific issues that had been previously discussed in the Biblical study of work, specifically that a person's vocation should serve others and meet their real needs; should provide for the needs of one's own family; should provide individuals with monetary means to help the poor; and will provide Christians with opportunities to be a witness for Christ in the marketplace. Clear examples were plentiful as our interviews proceeded.

Candy Smith is a nurse at a local hospital in Spokane, Washington. A mother of five girls, Candy works part-time for both the accompanying medical insurance and the financial income. Her husband is self-employed in a successful construction business, but with the rising costs of medical expenses, Candy's benefits are a substantial contribution to her family's physical needs. She also is respectfully aggressive in bringing the hope of Christ to her patients and praying for and with them. This outspokenness has brought her trouble with hospital administration on occasion, but her

attitude reflects that of Peter and John's to the rulers and elders in Jerusalem in Acts 4:19 "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."<sup>16</sup>

Though not yet on the mission field, Bryce Fonda is able to explain how many missionaries are completely dependent upon pilots to get them to unreached people groups, bring supplies, and evacuate them for a medical or political crisis. His ability to be the missionary's best friend is not limited to flying skills. Bryce explains that he will be fully trained in the maintenance of planes so that he can keep the planes in good working order. An added aspect of being a missionary pilot is the need to raise his own financial needs through seeking financial support of fellow Christians who realize the vital role his profession fulfills in mission endeavors. Though raising financial support is not an easy or personally enjoyable part of his future vocation, his willingness to complete this part of his preparation also reveals Bryce's commitment and passion for his future vocation.<sup>17</sup>

John Leland's interview is exceptionally inspiring. John is a youth pastor turned realtor. He and his wife, Kim (beautician), are interviewed together. John sees himself serving God and people in meeting a person's need to have a roof over their head. He helps clients find homes and serves them with integrity and care. He also shares Christ with colleagues in the company with which he is associated.

A series of events caused John and Kim to take stock of their financial situation and see it as a means to help others. Together they decided to live off of Kim's income (the lesser of their two) for one entire year and give away all of John's income. They purposely chose to live off of Kim's income because of the greater dependency upon God

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<sup>16</sup> Candy Smith, interview by author, Spokane, WA, July 22, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Fonda, 2010.

that would be required for them to meet their own needs and the greater amount of resources they would have available to give away because of John's potentially larger income. That year God blessed John's business greatly and they were able to give generously. They have kept a modified pattern of that living arrangement ever since.<sup>18</sup> The command of Paul to the believers in Ephesus to work with their own hands so that they have something to share with those in need was modeled wonderfully in a contemporary context.<sup>19</sup>

One final sample of answers from question number five comes from jeweler and business owner, CJ Pounder. CJ shared how he delights in helping people find just the right item to celebrate special events of their lives. Beyond this, each morning before the store opens he leads a short devotional and prayer. All employees are invited, but it is clearly communicated as not being mandatory. Over the years he has been sought out by employees for help, advice and marital counseling. His most recent adventure has been the forming of a 501C company which sells jewelry here in the U.S. that is made by Christians in Ghana. The prices are modest but much greater than the designers in Ghana could ever receive in their own country.<sup>20</sup> CJ's excitement over being able to serve God and help people is palpable. Again, pieces of God's intention for work are being fleshed out in tangible ways for the students to witness and contemplate.

The sixth and final question asked each adult was: How does your relationship with Jesus Christ affect the quality of the work you do and the passion that you bring to your vocation?

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<sup>18</sup> John Leland, interview by author, December 1, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 4:28.

<sup>20</sup> Pounder, 2010.

As previously mentioned, compartmentalization of a person's spiritual life, where God is considered a part of Sundays but real life begins on Monday, does not fit what God intended for his people. These ten adults who were interviewed have this understanding as the following examples attest.

Roger Mohrlang: "I am committed to teaching the Bible passionately and well, because it is the means of converting and discipling my students – and that is my calling, and I must take my stewardship seriously."<sup>21</sup>

Dottie Mohrlang: "In many ways I tend to think that others could do my job better, but the job has been given to me by God. So I do the best I can, with both humility and joy, always knowing that any real fruit is his job – a great relief!"<sup>22</sup>

Sean Culver: "Because of my relationship with Christ, I want to do the best I can in both of my jobs. I represent Christ to many people in my retail job and if I am a slacker, they will think less of me and Jesus. I want to be faithful and obedient and do all things to His glory."<sup>23</sup>

Val Ferderer: "Staying in a thriving, close relationship with Christ throughout my years of homeschooling is crucial to the success of my endeavors. Times when I did not walk closely with him were definitely way less effective and purposeful. If I am going to teach my children to love him, it has to be a reality in my own life."<sup>24</sup>

Dave Vaughn: "When people ask how they can pray for me, most often I say; Pray that my walk with Jesus would be first and foremost and my time with him sweet.

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<sup>21</sup> Morhlang, Roger, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Morhlang, Dottie, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Culver, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ferderer, 2010.

If I am not walking closely with Him and talking with Him throughout the days, I am choosing to do it alone and that means trouble.<sup>25</sup>

The students were presented with tangible examples of what it means to steward one's talents to serve God and to talk with adults whose choices and performance in their vocations reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ.

### **Assessing Student Understanding and implementation**

#### **Feedback after Each Session**

The year-long project began on July 18, 2009 and instruction was completed on July 18, 2010. Throughout every aspect of the project feedback was received immediately from the students. As mentioned previously, the initial teaching on "The Theology of Work" during the ministry trip included an individual study in the afternoons where reading and journaling took place, followed each night by group teaching and discussion that incorporated their afternoon's journaling.

Also mentioned earlier in this chapter, during the adult interviews, small group discussion occurred with students being asked by the evening's facilitator, "What was most helpful to you from tonight's interview?" along with one or more of the following list of rotating questions:

1. What is your dream job/career? Why?
2. Do you consider "working the rest of your life" a burdensome idea or an exciting idea? Why?
3. Have you had anyone do work for you that you were really impressed by (barber; waiter; mailman; coach; etc)? What impressed you?

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<sup>25</sup> Vaughn, 2009.

4. Is your work important to God? In what ways is it important and in what ways is it not?
5. What did God hardwire into you? In other words, what experiences, talents, passions and interests has He given you? For example:
  - a. Are you academically astute? What subjects come easily to you or are your favorite?
  - b. Do you have any significant physical limitations? Do you have any significant physical gifts of strength or athleticism?
  - c. Think about your personality. Are you good with people? Would you rather be by yourself? Are you a leader, a team builder, or a team player? Do you see yourself as shy or outgoing? Do you listen well? Do you talk a lot?
  - d. What have you learned about your own spiritual giftedness?
6. What jobs match what God has hardwired into you?
7. Which of those jobs would bring the greatest contribution to other people?
8. Is it your desire to serve God and people with the talents He has entrusted to you?

The adult youth staff, who facilitated the small groups, found the students ready to engage in discussion and comprehension and “buy-in” was high.

At the winter retreat where the topic was, “Having Right Expectations for How God will Lead You in Decision-Making,” the format again included immediate discussions in small groups. Here the youth staff found students struggling to apply the principles that had been taught. Through examples of common big decisions they will soon need to make (college, marriage, vocation, purchase of a car) the students were given the project to use the principles we had discussed and write out how they would expect God to give them direction. Though helpful, this project revealed that many students did not actually understand the principles when it came time to appropriate them in real-life decisions. One couldn’t help but wonder if the students possibly found the process too arduous and “unspiritual” and reverted to a hope that God will “just give them a feeling” in some mysterious undefined manner. Later survey results give some credence to the reality of this kind of thinking.

Overall, teaching session interaction and immediate small group discussion revealed a high level of comprehension and “buy-in.” The question “Lord, how can I steward the talents, gifts and passions that you have given me to best serve you and your world?” was reiterated continuously as a lifelong question one must answer, and students were asked frequently if they could repeat the question. At the year-end conclusion of the teaching aspect of this project, a five week summary of all the materials presented was reviewed in a classroom setting during the summer with parents invited to attend. Forty-eight parents joined 40 students for this review. The class was designed to be highly interactive.

### The Survey

The real test of understanding and application will be how the students live out their lives. Still, for now, two additional layers of information retrieval were remaining. Ten months later, on May 24, 2011, a survey was administered to 56 high school students on a normal youth group night. This survey would give insight into how much of the information was retained to memory and what level of “buy-in” remained ten months after the year-long emphasis.

The survey was administered to students in a very large room where they were able to spread out, allowing for the least amount of distraction and a great degree of privacy. Students were asked not to work ahead, but to wait until each statement was read, clarification questions about the statement were answered, and then they were to write their response. Eliminating written instructions, original spacing and the requested

information for demographics, Figure 5 on the following page documents the survey issued to 56 high school students from Northview Bible Church on May 24, 2011.

From the demographic record of participation information retrieved, an interesting comparison was able to be made. Represented amongst the students who took the survey, it was determined that 45% had received all or the majority of the teaching that occurred from July 2009 through July 2010. Due to graduation, non-attendance at key events during that year's focus, participation in the survey by the freshman class that moved into the high school group following the teaching, and normal variations of attendance by group members, 55% of those who took the survey had received little or none of this teaching. This unexpected occurrence gave opportunity to gain some insight into the impact of the teaching by comparing answers of those who had and those who had not received the instruction.

### Student Survey

1. God cares about what job I have in the future.  
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Neutral      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly Disagree
2. God is not concerned about my specific future job as long as it is not immoral or illegal.  
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Neutral      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly Disagree
3. My future vocations are to serve God in some way.  
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Neutral      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly Disagree
4. What is your current understanding of what the Bible teaches about work?
5. What outside influences have impacted your current thoughts in choosing a job? Please list the answers you check in numerical order of most influential to least influential.  
☐ Media (TV and Movies)  
☐ No one  
☐ Parents/family members  
☐ School  
☐ My church  
☐ Books I've read  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. I can expect a certain amount of direction from God in making my job decisions?  
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Neutral      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly Disagree
7. I can expect more direction from God in job decisions if I am planning on full-time Christian service.  
☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ Neutral      ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly Disagree
8. If you do expect a certain amount of direction from God in making job decisions, how do you expect God to give you that direction?
9. What factors do you currently consider important in making future vocational decisions? Please rank the answers you check in numerical order of importance:  
☐ Salary  
☐ Fun and enjoyment  
☐ Makes a great contribution to other people's lives  
☐ Location (the job is located where you want to live)  
☐ Good use of the talents God gave me  
☐ My family will be pleased  
☐ Prestige (others will think highly of me)  
☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 5. Thesis-project survey administered to high school students, 2011.

## Information Gathered From the Survey

Looking at responses through the demographic lens of the students' year in school from 2009-2010 and the student's gender, there was no revelation of significant differences in responses. As expected, there were some significant differences between those who had heard the majority of the information presented versus those who had not. The following gives the pertinent results and subsequent conclusions or interpretations of the survey.

The first response requested was from a "agree-disagree" statement: God cares about what Job I have in the future.

	Number of responses	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who received majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who did not receive majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages
Strongly Agree	28	50%	13	52%	15	48%
Agree	25	45%	11	44%	14	45%
Neutral	3	5%	1	4%	2	6%
Disagree						
Strongly Disagree						
Total	56	100%	25	100%	31	100%

Table 2. Responses from survey statement number one.

Table 2 shows a very high level of agreement among all students who took the survey. It would seem that Northview high school students have a strong belief in God's providence and/or concern regarding their future vocation. There is virtually no difference in responses between those who heard the majority of the teaching and those who did not.

The second survey response requested was again an “agree-disagree” statement:

God is not concerned about my specific job as long as it is not immoral or illegal.

	Number of responses	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who received majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who did not receive majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages
Strongly Agree						
Agree	16	29%	9	36%	7	23%
Neutral	9	16%	4	16%	5	16%
Disagree	22	39%	8	32%	14	45%
Strongly Disagree	9	16%	4	16%	5	16%
Total	56	100%	25	100%	31	100%

Table 3. Responses from survey statement number two.

As responses from Table 3 reveal, there was more disagreement in the response to this statement on two levels. First, a significant difference of opinion exists between those who agree that God is not concerned about the specific job they pursue (16) versus those who do not agree (31). Second, comparing answers of those who had not heard this project’s teaching and those who had, the students who had not heard the teaching were even more convinced of God’s interest in their specific vocations. That result is a little perplexing in that the teaching aspect of this project specifically taught that logically one should use their God-given gifts to serve him in vocations that would match those gifts.

Overall, 61% of those not receiving the majority of the teaching weighed in as disagreeing that God is not concerned about the specific job a person pursues as long as it is not immoral or illegal. Later responses given in question three will reveal that a high percentage of students see every profession as an opportunity, place, and responsibility to serve God. Also, responses to question nine of the survey give further insight into the student’s thinking on this matter as the number one factor in making future vocational

decisions listed by those who heard the majority of the project’s teaching was “Good use of the talents God gave me.” This suggests an understanding on the student’s part that serving God and using one’s talents in doing so is the main issue, not the specific job.

The third survey response to agree or disagree with was: My future vocation is to serve God in some way.

	Number of responses	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who received majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who did not receive majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages
Strongly Agree	28	50%	18	72%	10	32%
Agree	23	41%	6	24%	17	55%
Neutral	3	5%	1	4%	2	6%
Disagree	2	4%			2	6%
Strongly Disagree						
Total	56	100%	25	100%	31	100%

Table 4. Responses from survey statement number three.

Statement three reveals a significantly higher percentage of students who received the majority of the teaching “strongly agreeing” versus those who did not – 72% versus 32%. Overall, there is 91% agreement of both groups that service to God through their vocations is important. The next question reveals that students have are gaining an understanding of what the Bible teaches about work and, therefore, what it means to have their future vocations “serve God.”

The fourth response requested in the survey comes in the form of a question: What is your understanding of what the Bible teaches about work? The following are the eleven most repeated responses by students. Students could respond with more than one answer. Variations in wording of common responses are standardized.

1. Our work should serve and glorify God (18 responses).
2. We are to work as if we’re working for God (11 responses).

3. Work is good (9 responses).
4. God created us in his image and he is a worker (8 responses).
5. We are to work joyfully and diligently (8 responses).
6. We need to use our talents to glorify God in whatever we do (6 responses).
7. We are to respect our bosses (5 responses).
8. We must choose a vocation that does not go against any of God's commandments or teachings (5 responses).
9. We work, in part, so we have resources to give to those in need (3 responses).
10. We are put here on earth, in part, to take care of it (3 responses).
11. God created us to work, but since the fall, it has become hard and sometimes a burden (3 responses).

Thirty-six additional responses were given that were repeated only once by another student or were given as a solo response.

Attesting to the importance of teaching on this subject, it is worth noting that those who heard the majority of the teaching on work and listened to the interviews were able to explain more of what Scripture teaches about work and were more articulate and succinct in their answers. As a measurement, the following main points from the instruction given on "The Theology of Work" were used to categorize the student's responses:

- 1) God is a worker and created us to be co-laborers with him.
- 2) Work is to express love to God and to people.
- 3) How work is an extension of God's work.
- 4) Why work often seems unpleasant.

Students were encouraged to give their full understanding in response to question four. Table 5 reveals the significantly larger amount of accurate understanding recorded by students who received the teaching on the theology of work as compared to those who did not receive the teaching.

	Number of students whose answers reflected all 4 elements of the 4 main points presented.	Number of students whose answers reflected 3 elements of the 4 main points presented.	Number of students whose answers reflected 2 elements of the 4 main points presented.	Number of students whose answers reflected 1 element of the 4 main points presented.	Number of students whose answers reflected no elements of the 4 main points presented.
Students who received the majority of the teaching on the theology of work (25 total students)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	11 (44%)	10 (40%)	0
Students who did not receive the majority of the teaching on the theology of work (31 total students)	0	0	5 (16%)	20 (65%)	6 (19%)

Table 5. Answers given to survey question 4 that reflect elements of the 4 main points presented during the teaching on the theology of work.

Sixty percent of students who received the teaching could recall half or more of the major points taught about work compared to only 16% of students who could not. These results are of great encouragement as to the impact and importance of teaching these Biblical truths. Obeying what one knows is the constant challenge for followers of Christ. One can only intentionally follow what one knows, and the results that show a high level of understanding regarding work are worth celebrating.

At the same time, the obvious is glaring. Though nearly all the students at NBC believe God cares about their work, among those who missed out on the teaching about work, the majority have very little understanding of God's view of work. This is compelling motivation for continuing to teach on this subject.

The fifth survey response requested is a multiple choice question: What outside influences have impacted your current thoughts in choosing a job? Please list the answers you check in numerical order of most influential to least influential.

Not surprising, according to Table 6, parents and family members are the most influential voice in a student's life when it comes to choosing a vocation. Also worth noting is the apparent lack of influence media has on students vocational thinking. On the negative side of these responses is the low fourth position that the church places in being influential. There is some vagueness in the wording of statement number five that may have led students to think the statement was referring to outside influences that impact their choice of "specific jobs" versus what voices influence their vocational decision-making philosophy, which was the intent of the question. If that is the case, then the church's low influence may be undervalued.

The fact that NBC students value the advice and direction of their parents over any other voices in their lives should be of great encouragement to fathers and mothers. This also means that parents need to be able to think clearly and Biblically as they give direction to their sons and daughters. This gives rise to the question as to future formatting when presenting these materials. Should this material be taught in its entirety to parents as well? Should more of the teaching happen in a combined student and parent setting? Would the students be as transparent in a combined setting? These questions will be exciting ones to work through.

<b>1<sup>st</sup> choices</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>No one</b>	<b>Parents – family</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>Books I’ve read</b>	<b>Other:</b>
Those who had received the majority of the teaching (25)	1 (4%)		11 (44%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)		7 (28%)
Those who DID NOT receive the majority of the teaching (31)		1 (3%)	18 (58%)	4 (12%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	5 (16%)
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Choice</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>No one</b>	<b>Parents – family</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>Books I’ve read</b>	<b>Other:</b>
Those who had received the majority of the teaching (25)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	10 (40%)	6 (24%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)	
Those who DID NOT receive the majority of the teaching (31)	2 (6%)	3 (10%)	7 (23%)	6 (19%)	4 (12%)	5 (16%)	4 (12%)

Table 6. Responses from survey statement number five.

The sixth request survey response was another “agree-disagree” statement: I can expect a certain amount of direction from God in making my job decisions.

	Number of responses	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who received majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who did not receive majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages
Strongly Agree	16	29%	8	32%	8	26%
Agree	29	52%	12	48%	17	55%
Neutral	10	18%	5	20%	5	16%
Disagree						
Strongly Disagree	1	2%			1	3%
Total	56	100%	25	100%	31	100%

Table 7. Responses from survey statement number six.

Nearly all students anticipate God to give them some direction as they make vocational decisions, but questions seven and eight will reveal “fuzzy thinking” as to how God will give them direction.

Once again, in “agree-disagree” fashion, the seventh response requested of students is to the following statement: I can expect more direction from God in job decisions if I am planning on full-time Christian service.

	Number of responses	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who received majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages	Number of responses from those who did not receive majority of teaching	Responses converted to percentages
Strongly Agree	7	12%	2	8%	5	16%
Agree	10	18%	5	20%	5	16%
Neutral	12	21%	3	12%	9	29%
Disagree	22	39%	11	44%	11	35%
Strongly Disagree	5	9%	4	16%	1	3%
Total	56	100%	25	100%	31	100%

Table 8. Responses from survey statement number seven.

Responses to question number seven reflect a greater understanding by those who took in most of the teaching of this project regarding God’s direction for every vocation. That understanding is represented in a 60% versus 38% disagreement with the written statement and a higher level of “strongly agree” among those not receiving the teaching.

One concludes that students who received the teaching “expectations of how God directs us” believe that all vocations are equally important to God and expect the same degree of guidance from God regardless of the career path they feel would best steward their talents and serve God. This reflects a correct understanding that God has implanted certain talents into every person and that a person can expect guidance in how best to steward those talents in service to him. As previous chapters have cited, it is extremely important that our students understand that God will direct them toward various careers, some full-time Christian vocations, some secular vocations, but each equally important in serving God and his creation.

The eighth response requested reverts to the form of a question: If you expect a certain amount of direction from God in making job decisions, how do you expect God to give you that direction? The following are the nine responses that were mentioned by more than one student. Students were able to respond with more than one answer. An additional fifteen answers were given, but each only once. Variations in wording of common responses are again standardized.

1. God will lead my vocational decisions by opening and closing doors (23 responses).
2. God will lead me through his word (17 responses).
3. God will lead me through the counsel of people: parents, friends, teachers (16 responses).
4. God will lead me through prayer (14 responses).
5. God will lead me as I identify the talents with which he has endowed me (8 responses).
6. God will make me feel like I need to do a specific job (4 responses).
7. I have no idea (4 responses).
8. I will sense a subtle influence and a sense of peace from God (4 responses).
9. God will use certain events to point me in a direction (3 responses).

The disparity between those who had received the majority of the teaching of this project versus those who did not was again significant on this question. The following is a brief summary of the teaching found in chapter two with regard to how God gives direction: 1) through his Word (moral will); 2) through our seeking wisdom via prayer, research, common sense and counsel from others; 3) asking for special guidance; and 4) submitting to God's sovereignty. Table 9 gives a summary of student's ability to recollect this teaching.

	Able to give all four of the major Biblical points	Able to give three of the major Biblical points	Able to give two of the major Biblical points	Able to give one of the major Biblical points	Unable to give any of the major Biblical points
Answers from 25 students who received this teaching	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)
Answers from 31 students who did not receive this teaching	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	7 (23%)	10 (32%)	13 (42%)

Table 9. Biblical responses from survey question number eight.

One year after the teaching aspect of this project, 40% of those who received the project's teaching were able to list two of the accurate expectations taught for how God gives people direction and an additional 12 % could list three. Not surprisingly, only 26% of those who did not receive the project's teaching could list the same amount of Biblical information, and 42% could not list any accurate expectations at all.

Regardless of whether or not they received the teaching on right expectations for how God normally gives guidance, most NBC students default to one expectation – God will guide them by opening and closing doors of opportunity. This is one correct expectation, but it reveals an exceedingly limited understanding of the information presented. As will be noted in the proceeding evaluation of this thesis-project, this teaching needs to receive more attention, particularly in the practice of receiving God's guidance in decision-making.

The ninth and final response requested comes from a multiple choice question: What factors do you currently consider important in making future vocational decisions? Please rank the answers you check in the numerical order of importance.

One can see in table 10, on the following page, that percentages are highest in the areas that this project's teaching would consider the most important factors for making future vocational decisions, namely: to make good use of (steward) the talents God has given each person, and to choose a vocation that makes the greatest contribution to people's lives. Hearing or not hearing the teaching of the project did not seem to be a major factor in the responses to this question. Focus group responses will further confirm this ranking.

<b>First Choice (56)</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>Fun and enjoyment</b>	<b>Makes a great contribution to people's lives</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Good use of the talents God gave me</b>	<b>My family will be pleased</b>	<b>Prestige</b>	<b>Other</b>
Received majority of teaching (25)	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	1 (4%)		12 (48%)	2 (8%)		2 (8%)
DID NOT receive majority of teaching (31)	1 (3%)	7 (23%)	7 (23%)		13 (42%)	1 (3%)		2 (6%)
<b>Second Choice (56)</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>Fun and enjoyment</b>	<b>Makes a great contribution to people's lives</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Good use of the talents God gave me</b>	<b>My family will be pleased</b>	<b>Prestige</b>	<b>Other</b>
Received majority of teaching (25)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	13 (52%)		2 (8%)			
DID NOT receive majority of teaching (31)	3 (10%)	9 (29%)	10 (32%)	2 (6%)	7 (23%)			

Table 10. Responses from survey statement number nine.

## The Focus Groups

One final gathering of information came from two focus groups. These two groups were delineated by the year of graduation and consisted of the graduating classes of 2011 and 2012 combined, and 2013. The class of 2011 was very small, with but two students regularly involved, thus the reason for combining them with the class of 2012. The class of 2014 participated in the survey but not the teaching aspects of this thesis-project and, therefore, was not gathered as a focus group. As stated earlier, their survey responses became a helpful source of comparison to those who did hear the teaching and interviews.

An explanation is necessary regarding the absence of a focus group report from the class of 2010. This class participated in the various aspects of the project. After meeting with this group, it was determined that the design of the questions for focus groups (theirs was the first one to meet) needed drastic changes. Questions had been poorly structured and gave little additional information than received via the survey; therefore, the class of 2010's focus group responses will not be recorded.

The focus group from the combined class of 2011 and 2012 consisted of 14 students and will be referred to as focus group one where delineation is useful. The focus group from the class of 2012 consisted of 12 students and will be referred to as focus group two. Focus group one met on June 5<sup>th</sup> of 2011, while group two met on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, 2011. Questions were asked of the students that probed their level of understanding and retention and honest intentions of future use of the teaching. Also, students were given opportunity to ask questions regarding any aspect of the year's focus. Responses will not all be delineated by which focus group they came from because analysis often

showed no significant difference between their responses. A total of 26 students participated in this aspect of the project. This number was a disappointing 54% decline from those who had participated in the survey. Still, the information is valuable and is set forth below.

The informal gathering lent itself to lots of laughter, open candor and meaningful insights. Except for question number one, the format was complete volunteer feedback with no one specifically being asked to answer a question. Response to the first question was to answer in the affirmative by raising one's hand and then volunteering to answer.

The information desired from these discussions centered specifically on three issues:

- 1) Can the students restate the key question they were challenged to use as the guide by which to make their vocational decisions: "Lord, how can I steward the talents, gifts and passions that you have given me to best serve you and your world?"
- 2) Has there been "buy-in" to this thesis-project's emphasis that Christians should make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ? Why or why not?
- 3) Can they anticipate what might hinder them, in the near and far future, from making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ?

Regarding the first issue: Can the students restate the key question they were challenged to use as the guide by which to make their vocational decisions: "Lord, what talents have you given me and how can I steward them to best serve you and your creation?" Seventeen could restate it nearly word for word, while 9 could not. Most comments expressed the importance of this question as a vocational gyroscope.

In open discussion about the importance or unimportance about that question, students from the first focus group made the following comments:<sup>26</sup>

"What we do has to express the gifts he gave us."

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with high school focus group 1, Spokane, WA, June 5, 2011.

“This question is foundational for choosing our work.”

“Through our jobs we steward the gifts God gave us.”

“This question checks our motivations.”

“If we don’t ask this question, we won’t try to glorify God.”

“It keeps our focus on God. It gives credit to him for our talents, and then helps me choose my job.”

“It’s a good litmus test for where we’re going or headed.”

The second focus group added the following comments:<sup>27</sup>

“It helps me qualify the best use of how God wired me.”

“It keeps us from being selfish.”

“It keeps God’s purposes in the forefront of our thinking.”

“It helps us find the right job, and the right job keeps our sights off ‘self’ because it will come naturally. Then the job can be a ministry because we’re not worried about how to do the job.”

“God knew what he was doing when he gave us the gifts – so we should use them.”

There was virtually no disagreement that this is a crucial question to ask oneself, and yet survey results from question number two, “God is not concerned about my specific future job as long as it is not immoral or illegal,” reported much less conviction for matching their God-given talents to specific vocations (see figure 4) as will the responses to the second question asked in the focus groups.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with high school focus group 2, Spokane, WA, June 12, 2011

Responses from focus group two to the second issue: Has there been “buy-in” to this thesis-project’s emphasis that Christians should make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ? Why or why not?<sup>28</sup>

“God is not necessarily concerned with the choice of job but with our behavior at the job.”

“We are going to spend ‘major time’ at our job. All of our lives need to reflect Christ in us.”

“We need to always be a light.”

The first focus group added the following responses:<sup>29</sup>

“I’m really interested in music. I want to use it to honor God. God has put us here to honor him.”

“The attitude in how I do a job is more important than what job I choose.”

“I’m not sure, but I do know that I want to put myself in a position where I can represent Christ.”

“Like was already said, we work so much of our life, and our job gets to impact lots of people.”

“If a person is committed to Christ, all decisions should reflect that commitment.”

“We need to find a job to bring glory to God, and it shouldn’t become more important than him. It should be a job that serves others, like a teacher who can share Christ and also just teach really well.”

“Choose a moral job, and then when doing the job make sure our attitude reflects

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with high school focus group 2, Spokane, WA, June 12, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Interview with high school focus group 1, Spokane, WA, June 5, 2011

our beliefs (in Christ).”

This further discussion revealed that many still default to God being most concerned about how we live our lives during the performance of our vocation and less concerned about the actual choice of vocation as long as it is moral and legal. Though true to a point, their responses lacked the intentionality hoped for regarding identifying and stewarding talents God gave them for the ruling of his creation.

The third and final issue: Can they anticipate what might hinder them, in the near and far future, from making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ? Before listing exact quotes, here are two interesting, if not alarming, tabulations of responses during this discussion: 1) Four students said plainly, “I do not believe I will try to make vocational decisions based upon my commitment to Christ.” 2) Seventeen additional students listed potential situations that could lure them away from making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ. Though many of those 17 comments will be attributed to one person as one quote, during the discussion often many students would agree that the stated factor/s could influence them as well. Focus group two offered these comments:<sup>30</sup>

“I don’t end up liking a particular job.”

“Money could be a distraction.”

“I don’t know my gifts or care to figure them out.”

“What the world says is success – versus – what I think I should or could do.”

“Comparing myself to others.”

“Peer pressure, that is, what others are doing and wanting to be with them.”

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with high school focus group 2, Spokane, WA, June 12, 2011

Focus group one added the following thoughts:<sup>31</sup>

“The speed of life may keep me from doing it. I would like to, but I am not sure I will.”

“Success could distract me.”

“I might just forget as time goes on. Hopefully it is my default mode, but I could get distracted.”

“I might want to do something that I am not sure God wants me to do.”

“Pride and success or just forgetting could keep me from following through. I want to set a way to remember.”

In anticipating factors that might draw them away from making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ, the students themselves seemed to go beyond the hypothetical question to a soul-search of how big of a role stewardship will play in their decision-making process. As noted, with striking frankness, some said their commitment to Christ will have no bearing on their career decision-making. Others anticipated that certain factors could cause them to veer from this objective. One appreciates their honesty; fears the possibility of yet another group of students imprisoned to selfish ambition; and is saddened that many may not choose to co-labor with God in ruling his earth. There is hope that in identifying these potential derailing issues, this group of NBC students will begin and continue the exciting, arduous and fulfilling journey of stewarding their God-given talents in serving him in the myriad of vocations necessary for the ruling of God’s earth.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with high school focus group 1, Spokane, WA, June 5, 2011

## Conclusions

Having retrieved feedback from students to ascertain if they understood and embraced the teachings of this thesis-project, the following summary conclusions can be made regarding the beliefs of the high school students who participated:

- 1) NBC high school students believe God cares about their future job. This project reinforced already held beliefs more than it changed beliefs.
- 2) NBC high school students believe their vocations should serve God. One hundred percent of those who received the teaching of this project believe this compared to 89% who did not receive the teaching. One is encouraged by both percentages but ecstatic by the 100% “buy-in” on this aspect of vocational decision-making by those who listened to God’s Word on the subject.
- 3) In serving God, many NBC students still seem unconvinced that their vocational decision-making should reflect their commitment to Christ through the use of the talents he has given them to steward. One would have hoped for a more significant transformation of beliefs through the Biblical teachings of this project. Responses to survey question number two and focus group question number two indicate that many NBC students believe the actual vocation is not as important as is their Godly behavior during the performance of their future job. While applauding the conviction of Godly behavior in the marketplace, the NBC student ministries must push students toward stewardship of their talents on loan from God.
- 4) Many students have a general, albeit partial, understanding of God’s purpose for work. More teaching on the topic is warranted.
- 5) Most cite their parents as the single most influential voice in their lives as they make vocational decisions. Parents must be affirmed regarding this truth and discussion about what training and resources would help them guide their sons and daughters will need to be discussed in the future.
- 6) The vast majority anticipate that God will give them direction, but most are still “fuzzy” about how that direction will come.

Having completed all three aspects of the thesis-project: direction from God’s word; extensive exposure to adults who consider their vocation as an aspect of their devotion to Christ; retrieval of feedback from students to ascertain if they understood and

embraced the Biblical teachings of this thesis-project, the final chapter will focus on an evaluation of the project that is now complete.

## CHAPTER 5

### AN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The initial presupposition of this thesis was that the vast majority of Christian high school students are not making vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ because their faith in God is not actually integrated into decisions or practices of everyday life. This presupposition would include the high school group of Northview Bible Church, the setting for which this project took place. Also presupposed was a belief that this anemic and inaccurate view of God's calling on their lives could be influenced through the integrated experiences of direction from God's Word and extensive exposure to adults who consider their vocation an aspect of their devotion to Christ. Written responses from students through completion of a survey and open discussion in focus groups were the methods used to measure whether these presuppositions were accurate.

The overall results were encouraging, demonstrating the wisdom of God's Word and how it transforms one's thinking and intended life practice when a person submits their life to its teaching and so, to God. God's wisdom leads people away from empty selfishness and keeps our eyes from being fixed on the comforts and treasures of a temporal world. His wisdom leads people to the fulfillment of what mankind was created for: loving God and people in the here and now<sup>1</sup>, with our eyes fixed on an eternity in heaven and the inheritance that awaits believers.<sup>2</sup>

Intentions are to repeat all aspects of this project every two to three years with future classes of high school students at Northview Bible Church. Having said that and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:36-40

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 1:3-4

having now completed the project portion of this thesis, the following are reflections and positive changes to be made:

- 1) The three part approach of this project was very effective: a) Biblical instruction, b) interviews of adult professionals who exemplify the teaching, and c) the student feedback to measure and solidify understanding and “buy-in.”
- 2) The conclusions being arrived at from the massive research being performed by the National Study of Youth and Religion<sup>3</sup> seem to more closely describe the lives of NBC students who did not receive the teaching nor hear the adult interviews pertaining to this thesis-project than those who did. In particular, the NSYR’s conclusion that “American teenagers view God as a butler or genie or therapist whose main objective is to meet their needs and help them feel better”<sup>4</sup> was more descriptive of the NBC high school students that were not brought through the various aspects of this thesis-project than those who were. One must postulate that clear Biblical teaching and being able to observe adults who obediently and fully follow Christ are both necessary if American teenagers are going to live wholly for Christ in every area of their lives, including in their vocations. One must also acknowledge that this conclusion is merely a reiteration and application of what Scripture has already clearly taught and not a new discovery.<sup>5</sup>
- 3) The timing for the Biblical instruction aspect of the thesis-project was thought to be strategic, but ended up being short-sighted. It was thought that presenting the majority of the teaching at both the mission trip and the winter retreat would supply a concentrated and undistracted time frame. Though that did result, using these forums for the majority of the teaching also limited the number of students who heard the teaching. At the time of the project’s teaching, approximately 50 students regularly attended the high school youth group, yet only 25 were present on the mission trip and 35 attended the winter retreat. Current regular attendance averages 65 students, which accounts for the high participation in the survey (56), though roughly half had not received the Biblical instruction from the previous year. When this material is presented again, it will take place during the regular high school group night as that is the gathering which regularly has the highest attendance.
- 4) Keeping this topic in the forefront of the student’s minds without it growing monotonous is essential. Repetition and objects of remembrance flood the pages of the Bible as a method God seems to use to help people become established in his truth. Today’s American teenager has the same need of this methodology. With this in mind, the student ministries of Northview Bible Church include small

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Smith, *National Study of Youth and Religion*, [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org) [accessed May 15, 2011].

<sup>4</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2; John 13:15; Philippians 3:17.

groups called Discipleship Groups, where such repetition could take place in an engaging and mentoring manner. Discipleship groups consist of three to five students with an adult facilitator. The groups' purpose is not to teach another Bible study, but to debrief student's own reading from Scripture and to talk about living it out in their lives. As such, the groups weekly discuss a list of accountability questions. It would be advantageous to add to this list of questions ones that would remind students of the need to make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ. As one student remarked in the focus groups, "The speed of life may keep me from doing it. I would like to, but I am not sure I will,"<sup>6</sup> while another said frankly, "I might just forget as time goes on. Hopefully it is my default mode, but I could get distracted."<sup>7</sup> Still another commented "Pride and success or just forgetting could keep me from following through. I want to set a way to remember."<sup>8</sup> Including discussion of this issue in Discipleship Groups would be one way to assist students in keeping this a front-burner issue. Another avenue to keep this issue in front of the students in an engaging way would be to occasionally have additional adult professionals come and share their story in-between the years when this teaching is presented.

- 5) Specific teaching on the theology of work can be improved and delivered with more conviction as a result of input from additional study that has occurred since the original lessons were taught. In particular, additional insights from great Christian teachers and thinkers during crucial societal shifts in our world's history, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and William Law during the Reformation and Puritan eras should result in students having more passion to have their commitment to Christ impacting their vocational decisions. During the post industrial age and our modern era, the influence and writings of Douglas Brouwer, Os Guinness and John Piper need to be shared as they have well articulated our current mindset and the escape route back to God's good, pleasing and perfect will for our lives. These suggested improvements should not be heard in a discouraging manner with regard to the teaching or results of the teaching that was dispersed during the first presentation of this thesis' topic; quite the opposite. Since, by the mercy of God, the first time teaching on this critical subject had measurable impact, how much greater impact might take place with the additional study and reflection that has taken place since those first sessions?
- 6) The specific teaching delivered regarding how God normally gives guidance to an individual would be improved upon if more time was taken for practicing the teachings of Scripture. Student responses on the survey and from youth staff feedback after the high school retreat (where this information was taught) reveal this need. The teaching was practical, but because guidance for decision-making takes a great deal of prayer, thinking through God's Word, self-examination, research, and counsel from others, more opportunities to practice God's way of

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<sup>6</sup> Focus group 1, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Focus group 1, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Focus group 1, 2011.

receiving his guidance would serve students well in preparation for every area of life. It is an arduous process that may require more mentoring in addition to teaching.

- 7) “Excellent,” “high impact,” and “real life examples” are the words that come to mind in recalling the influence upon the students by those adults who shared how they serve God through their vocations. The next time this series is presented, digital recording of their presentations must take place so that students who miss those nights can still benefit through a later viewing, also affording parents access as well.
- 8) In subsequent presentations of this subject, a before and after survey should be administered. It was very helpful having a large freshmen class and new members of the youth group take the survey when they had not received the project’s teaching. They became a valuable point of comparison and measurement regarding the project’s influence on the student’s worldview. A before and after survey would add additional measurement of effectiveness and understanding.
- 9) Because student responses indicate that parental advice and direction is the greatest influence on their vocational decision-making, it would be wise for the church to be intentional in being a resource to parents as they give direction to their sons and daughters. Much of the same teaching could be taught to parents so that discussion could ensue based upon the same information.<sup>9</sup> Also, though the public school system in the Spokane, Washington area exposes students to vocational assessment instruments that could help identify personal talents and interests, no assessment tools are being administered that are created with a Biblical worldview in mind. In the future, Northview Bible Church could be of great service to God’s work and to parents by offering one day conferences or seminars that utilize the latest assessment tools that are created with a Biblical worldview. Though such tools and conferences come with a price tag attached, they often include parent participation as well as follow-up coaching and would be well worth the time and cost for helping a young man or woman on the journey of discovering the talents, gifts and passions that God gave them.<sup>10</sup>

With these reflections and adjustments, the Biblical teachings of this thesis-project that calls high school students at Northview Bible Church to make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ will be an intentionally repeated

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence of this need was witnessed during the combined student and parent summary course in June, 2010. On three separate occasions, parents stayed after to seek advice on their own vocational decision-making or to comment about their own journey and how useful the teaching was for them.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 139:14-16

study accompanied by mentoring and accountability through relational structures that already exist. Personal growth and experience over a student's lifetime will constantly impact their conclusions and choices, but the contention of this project is that a high school student can and must make it their lifelong practice to make vocational decisions that reflect their commitment to Christ. That being said, one final reflection needs to be made.

Though this thesis-project took place in the context of one non-denominational, evangelical church's high school youth group, the truth it contains is essential for Christian teenagers everywhere. What might happen if this became the theme of youth conferences or taught as part of the curriculum in Christian High schools or Christian liberal art colleges and universities? What if the main tenants were presented in pulpits for adults and students alike? What if a generation of Christian young people, soon to be the doctors and nurses, political leaders, school teachers, business owners, financial advisors, family counselors, professional athletes, world ambassadors, and military commanders of our world saw themselves as co-laborers with God in ruling his world? What if it permeated believer's thinking that they were given talents to steward in order to accomplish these very purposes for which God put them on this earth? This thesis-project is dedicated to this end.

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## VITA

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In joy and humility, Craig continues to ask God the question: “Lord, how can I best steward the talents and experiences you’ve entrusted to me to serve you and people?” He firmly believes the best answer to that question is for him to serve teenagers and the next generation of youth leaders.

Craig Ferderer currently lives in Spokane, WA with his wife, Val and their daughter Ellie. He also has two grown sons, Ben (who is married to Michelle) and Beau. He is currently the pastor of Student Ministries at Northview Bible Church where he has served for 21 years, and is an adjunct faculty member at Moody Bible Institute – Spokane, in the Youth Ministry department.